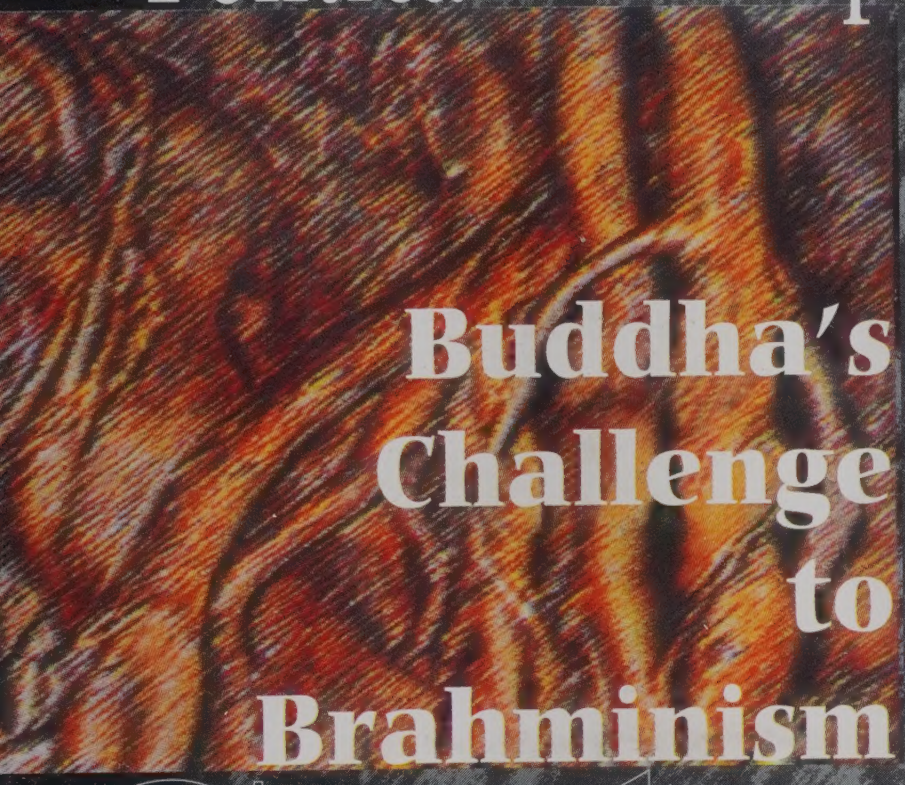
God as Political Philosopher



Buddha's Challenge to Brahminism

God as Political Philosopher

Kancha Ilaiah

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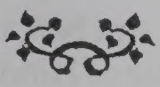
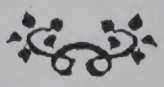


Also by the author

Why I Am Not a Hindu
A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy,
Culture and Political Economy (Samya, 3rd Rpt., 2000)

GOD AS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER

Buddha's Challenge to Brahminism



Kancha Ilaiah

Samya

To all those monks who died
in the defence of spiritual democracy
under the onslaught of many fascisms

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Contents

'As to dictatorship the Buddha would have none of it. He was born a democrat and he died a democrat. At the time he lived there were 14 monarchical states and 4 republics. He belonged to the Sakyas and the Sakyas' kingdom was a republic. He was extremely in love with Vaishali which was his second home because it was a republic.'

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
Writings and Speeches, vol. 3, p. 451

INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEMPORARY INDIAN socio-political situation is an explosive one in many respects. As education spreads to sections of society which were denied it for centuries, their demands on the Indian political system are increasing; their struggles are taking new forms. The roots of every struggle penetrate into times well beyond the present, and it is necessary to understand these roots in order to strengthen the struggle and turn it into a movement capable of influencing the future. Dialectical processes involving the resolution of contradictions in a society lead to change, either peacefully or violently. The politics of such change are complex. The social groups involved, the ideologies of contending groups/classes/castes, the material conditions of society may all indicate its direction—however, it is possible that the change itself may be more apparent than real, for the dominant class/caste and its ideology may coopt or incorporate its opposite as a strategy of survival. Hindu society dominated by brahminical ideology has survived to this day precisely by such strategies. There have been many movements that have questioned the caste-ridden, hierarchical Hindu social structures and brought about important changes, but none has effected a substantial change in the power relations of this society. Buddhism, which emerged as a response to Brahminism, eventually faded away in its country of origin, while becoming a political force to reckon with in some South Asian and South-East Asian countries. The contemporary Dalit movement (the neo-Buddhist movement) is not so much a movement to revive Buddhism as to challenge the caste system—to give a political identity to the Dalitbahujans (the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward

Classes), the subalterns—in their struggle for survival, assertion and power.

Clearly there is now a renewed attempt to Hinduize both Gautama Buddha and Buddhism, to coopt the Dalitbahujan movements into the 'Hindutva' fold. This phenomenon needs to be scrutinized, and, in order to do so, it is essential that we understand the ways in which Gautama Buddha has been deified, rendered sacred; why he has been called the ninth *avatara* of Vishnu and so on, instead of being regarded as a political thinker and revolutionary of his times. A similar displacement and devaluation of the Buddhist movement and of Buddhist thought, has taken place in scholarship. Scholars treat Gautama Buddha as a saint and a religious thinker and not as a revolutionary or a political theorist. The responsibility for this cooptation and distortion lies with colonial as well as nationalist scholars. During the nationalist period except Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar all scholars of philosophy treated Buddhism as part of Hinduism.

In modern times European scholars conducted extensive studies aimed at understanding the political philosophies of ancient Greek political thinkers. Fifty years after independence Indian political scientists are still busy studying the political philosophy of the ancient Greeks. Few turn their attention to ancient Indian political philosophy and when they do so the focus of their attention is extremely limited. The only two ancient Indian political philosophers on whom some studies have been conducted are Manu and Kautilya, the upholders of the most hierarchical dimensions of Hindu thought. Several studies both archaeological and historical have established beyond doubt that Buddha lived before Manu and Kautilya. In fact, Buddha pre-dates Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Chinese historical records show that Buddha even pre-dates Confucius. Thus, if through careful study we are able to establish that he was a political thinker, Buddha would become the forerunner of all known political thinkers.[1]

But such an attempt is a gigantic research task. My objective is more modest. I only want to establish the essentially political nature of Buddha's philosophy so that future political scientists can study him as a political philosopher and not marginalize him as a mere religious reformer. In this book, therefore, I will only

sketch out in broad outline the political philosophy of Gautama Buddha. I hope the initial mapping will provide a base for scholars who intend to work on this subject in future. Let me add, however, that I consider this as a part of the much larger project of rewriting the history of India that some Indian scholars are engaged in at present.

Recently, many Third World scholars have questioned and criticized colonial historiography and its reconstruction of the Indian past. The Chinese actually took the lead in this direction; they undertook a critique of colonial history in the process of their national struggle. To a large extent Mao himself was responsible for the creative application of dialectical materialism to Chinese history. In our country, it was only Ambedkar who engaged in such a critique, limited as it was, during the freedom struggle. It is clear that the Communists and the Gandhian nationalists hardly made such an attempt. One unfortunate result of the absence of such serious attempts at rewriting Indian history is that the Indian state has come to be regarded as a Hindu state by some of its citizens. Thus, the secular aspect of Indian political history has been undermined. This secular dimension of Indian society will be strengthened only when we study the secular philosophies of our past and relate them to the present context. Questions about the secular traditions in India have been raised only in the recent period by communist movements, Dalitbahujan movements, women's movements and civil rights movements. It is these, particularly the Dalitbahujan and women's movements, that have forced us to apply dialectical materialism creatively to new areas.

The Schema

I have chosen to divide the study into eight chapters. The first tries to define what has been regarded as philosophy in the European and Indian contexts. It also critiques the literature on ancient Indian thought and sees how different schools of thought—colonial, nationalist and post-Independence progressive schools—have looked at the subject. In conclusion it attempts an assessment of the contribution and the limitations of these schools and their historiography.

The second chapter deals with pre-Buddhist social, economic and political conditions. Each speculative philosophy, I argue, emerges in its own socio-political situation. Out of the particular needs of its time, it evolves some general principles which are then considered universally applicable. This chapter, therefore, studies the socioeconomic and political conditions in pre-Buddhist India as an initial move in understanding Buddhist thought. It also examines the class and caste formations of that period and reviews the schools of thought that emerged just before the Buddhist school formulated its philosophical and ideological positions.

The third chapter sketches out a biography of Gautama Buddha. It tries to contextualize his evolution in the background of his family conditions and the childhood experiences that led to his renunciation and the formation of the *sangha* system.

The fourth chapter deals with Gautama Buddha's theory of the origin and the development of the state. It makes an attempt to understand the Buddhist discourses on dialectics and how he applied his dialectical tools to contemporary institutions. In order to put his theory of the state in a proper perspective, it briefly sketches out the methodology of Buddha; more particularly it deals with his theory of cause and effect. It also deals with the brahminical and Buddhist views of the state and examines the mainstream Hindu theories of the origin of the state so that a comparison between both the schools of thought becomes possible. Finally this chapter outlines Buddha's theory of social contract and compares it with Western theories of the origin of the state—particularly those of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau—in order to come to some assessment of the Buddhist theory of the origin of the state in the light of the theories of Western social contractualists.

The fifth chapter deals with Buddha's concepts of justice, democracy and administration. Buddha's understanding of justice is contrasted with Kautilya's concept of *dharma*. Buddha's perception and practices of democracy are carefully analysed and Buddhist administrative system is compared with contemporary Hindu administrative institutions. Further, Buddha's concepts of justice, democracy and administrative institutions are also compared with those of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

The sixth chapter deals with Buddha's views on property, rights and duties. In order to examine Buddha's understanding of property in a proper theoretical framework, we begin with a study of his views on the division of labour. Further, the chapter explores in detail the philosophy underlying the right to private property and to sangha property, and his views on land as private property and as communal property. This chapter also examines the rights and duties of the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* within the sangha system, and outside it. As the sangha system was socialistic in nature, more stress has been laid on the Buddhist concept of duties. Finally, the Buddhist understanding of rights and duties is compared with that of ancient Hindu and Greek thinkers.

The seventh chapter deals with Buddha's perspective on the question of classes and castes. At the outset the chapter tries to define castes and classes in the Indian context. Then it proceeds to discuss the theories of Manu and Kautilya on the question of classes and castes. The chapter tries to examine Buddha's understanding of caste. In the light of the rigid views of early Hindu thinkers about the caste structures in India, it shows how Buddha evolved laws to nullify the caste system and also how he admitted people belonging to various castes into the sangha. It examines his views on slavery, indebtedness and bondage, and how each one of these institutions reinforced the class structure among the Indian masses.

The eighth chapter deals with Buddha's views on women. Here we examine briefly the conditions of women in the pre-Buddhist period as well as the views of Manu, Kautilya and Vatsyayana on women because only in comparison with their thought can the advances marked by Buddha's treatment of women be understood properly. Beginning with the admission of women into the sangha, the chapter deals with the question of leadership, personality and individuality within the sangha system. It also examines how Buddha and his sangha helped to break the ideologies of family and marriage. The chapter also studies women's education and traces their political initiative within the sangha and outside, concluding with a discussion of the limitations of Buddha's understanding with regard to the question of women's liberation.

Finally, based on these eight chapters I will draw certain conclusions about Buddha's political philosophy.

The Sources

In this study I have used a combination of two types of analytical method. To arrive at some sense of the political and philosophical understanding of Buddha on various questions discussed so far, I have read the *Suttas* and *Pitakas* and reinterpreted the texts from the point of view of political philosophy and ideology. I regard the *Maha Parinibbhana Sutta*, the *Chullavagga*, *Mahavagga*, *Digha Nikaya* and *Vinaya Pitaka* as important sources for a reconstruction of the Buddha's political philosophy. However, since a meaningful reconstruction of such philosophy can only emerge if we consider these texts in their historical context, I have tried to analyse the *Suttas* and *Pitakas* in relation to their historical contexts.

Finally it must also be noted that I have not gone into the controversy over the dating of the Buddhist texts, because many historians have already discussed the questions pertaining to the chronological accuracy and authenticity of the *Suttas* and *Pitakas*. I have also not gone into questions such as whether what was incorporated into the *Suttas* and *Pitakas* was actually what Buddha said or whether they were interpolations, as these questions have also been debated by many. They have been satisfactorily settled, I believe, by scholars like Rhys Davids and Oldenberg. Many Indian scholars have also taken what is said in the *Suttas* and *Pitakas* as the original narration of Buddha himself. I also endorse the view that the precepts laid down in *Suttas* and *Pitakas* are the original opinions of Buddha himself. However, even now Eurocentrist political scientists and communal scholars may lay many traps for us with quibbles about the authenticity of these sources. There is absolutely no need to fall into such traps, because Buddha is one individual in ancient Indian history about whom we have a great deal of authentic information. This information comes to us from written documents, from Ashoka's pillars and from epigraphs. Such evidence is more than enough to reconstruct his philosophy and ideology.

A Postscript

The contemporary Indian scene calls for a critical assessment. The communalization of politics and the state, and the projection of

India as a 'Hindu nation' puts into jeopardy the whole idea of Indian nationhood and threatens the values of secularism. We must, therefore, question Hinduization or Islamization or Aryanization of any state. My conviction is that one of the most effective ways of opposing communalization of politics based on faith is to study our history and bring present-day Indian reality into focus. We must bring to light the fact that India has always been a country of contending forces and ideologies. This very realization will go a long way towards endorsing secular values in our country in spite of the communal clouds that hang over our heads.

As Buddha is treated in this book as a historical figure, and as the use of the noun 'Buddha' to describe Gautama after he attained enlightenment has become so common as to acquire the status of a proper name rather than a title, we propose to refer to him in the text simply as 'Buddha', omitting the customary 'the' before the name. This is for ease of reference as well as to avoid any implied deification of the man whose moral and political insight is the subject of this work. Furthemore, although there were in fact two sanghas—the bhikkhu sangha for men and the bhikkhuni sangha for women—I have nevertheless refered to the Buddhist monastic society as 'the sangha' unless the distinction between the too bodies is pertinent to the discussion, as the corporate identity of the sangha was stronger than its subdivisions.

NOTE

1. Several studies mention the year of Buddha's birth as 566 BCE whereas Confucius was born in 522 BCE and Socrates was born in 484 BCE. It is well known that Plato was Socrates' disciple and Aristotle that of Plato.

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Scholars on Buddha and Buddhism

In many respects ancient India remains an unexplored field. In some areas this is so because there is a dearth of recorded historical sources; in others because few people took an interest in studying the connections between available historical, literary and archaeological records in order to sketch out frameworks of the thought processes of the period. This is a double handicap.[1] Political scientists are particularly hampered in understanding ancient Indian political philosophy or theory because very few scholars have shown interest in the political dimensions of our past. Without a systematic analysis of ancient political philosophy and the institutions that emerged within the contemporary ideological framework, it is hardly possible to build up creative political models in the modern period.[2]

It is essential to study ancient Indian political philosophy or thought and the different schools that were at work at the formative stage of our society to understand the implications of the past for modern India. The most pivotal period in Indian political history was the sixth century BCE, which witnessed the emergence of turbulent speculative political philosophies.[3] It is against this background that I would like to place the political philosophy of Gautama Buddha, whose powerful influence on the political, economic and social behaviour of Indian society at that time was subsequently to spread to different parts of the world. Such a study is important for yet another reason. Today Dalitbahujan and anti-caste movements have assumed enormous significance both in the context of anti- and pro-reservation struggles and also in the context of the re-examination of Ambedkar's political philosophy. It must be remembered that though Ambedkar em-

braced Buddhism, it is clear from his writings that he treated it principally as a political and ideological movement. Further, in the post-Mandal debates of the nineties, the question of caste has come to occupy a pivotal position in the Indian polity. The Dalit-bahujan and neo-Buddhist movements have posed significant questions with regard to searching for the roots of anti-caste struggles. Given this context the importance of studying the socio-political views of Gautama Buddha as the first major forerunner that Indian social scientists can claim is all the greater.[4] However, Buddha's philosophy has to be studied as part of his overall political philosophy.

Defining Political Philosophy

It is important at this juncture to state what we understand by political philosophy. Philosophy *per se* is understood as a generalization of perceptions so that these generalizations become applicable to all similar situations. Philosophy, however, is related to the search for knowledge.[5] Usually terms like 'political philosophy', 'political theory' and 'political thought' are used interchangeably, and this is how I have used them in this book. Political philosophy is the study of a person's political and ideological formulations; it may or may not deal with the state, government and sovereignty because in a given society the state and government alone need not regulate the power relations among people. It is the conceptualization of such relations that is central to political philosophy. In a given society a distinct institution may structure these power relations between people. For example, in India caste is a key instrument in the structuralization of power relations, engendered to establish hegemonic and subordinate relations among people. As Randhir Singh has rightly pointed out, it is very important to extricate ourselves from the definitional schemes of Western scholars and begin to study thinkers of India in their own right.[6]

Unfortunately, not many Indian political scientists have made any serious attempt to study our ancient political philosophy. One of the reasons is that Indian political scientists are greatly influenced by Western writers and also by colonial ideology. In the colonial period, scholars from the colonizing culture began to

translate and interpret some key Indian texts. As early as 1794 William Jones had published Manu's *Dharma Shastra* and Colebrooke's *Digest of Hindu Law* appeared in 1801.[7] Based on such translations and commentaries, Western political scientists came to the conclusion that there was no creative political speculation in India. A whole range of Western writers—political scientists, contributors to encyclopaedias—all painted a dark picture of the creative and speculative abilities of the East. Some stated, for example: 'it is Western man and not Eastern man who is the cultural descendant of the Greeks';[8] 'there was little speculation about the problems of political philosophy [in the Eastern regions] as formulated in the West'; 'there is not outside Europe, much speculation about the basis of political obligation and the purpose of the state, with both of which Western political philosophy is mainly concerned';[9] 'the oriental Aryans never freed their politics from the theological and metaphysical environment in which it is embedded . . . therefore they were compelled to limit themselves practically to the philosophy of the European Aryan people'[10]—indicate that the East, colonized by the West in the early modern period, was also seen as a region that did not have creative minds and speculative thought.

One reason for the Western writers' constructing the minds of Eastern people as non-meritorious irrespective of their caste or class placement is that in ancient Greece, politics became differentiated from religion and science from myth whereas in the East such a differentiation never found expression.[11] With this notion they dismissed Gautama Buddha as a 'moralizer of public power', Kautilya as a 'shrewd thinker' and Confucius as an 'evolver of a code of conduct'.[12] On the one hand such a dismissal of Buddha, Kautilya and Confucius is based on insufficient information and analysis of Indian and Chinese thinkers, and on the other, it stems from the colonial conceptualization of the colonized. Just as in the post-Mandal era the upper castes of India began to argue that the Dalitbahujans have no creative minds, the colonialists argued in their hegemonic days that Eastern peoples did not possess such qualities. Each hegemonic caste/class/race constructed its own self as creative and the other as uncreative. I shall argue that the whole premise of colonial argument is wrong because Buddha, if not others, never mystified his arguments nor did he frame his

discourse in terms of religion. Indeed, that the notion of God never existed in his discourses is too well known to need stressing.

My precise argument, therefore, is that even definitions are not value-neutral. Neutrality is a myth that pervades the arguments of the Western political scientists with great subtlety. It is imperative, therefore, that we define political philosophy in our own terms. I do not mean that a definition must be continent-specific or region-specific—every definition is set against a particular socio-political background and each political philosopher addresses a specific political agenda. The political philosophy of a given thinker, in a given period of time, must address the institutions that structure power relations at that point in time. In India, for example, before the state became visible as a strong framework for society, the institution of caste originated, developed and began this structuring. The notions of justice, authority, rights and duties were understood and addressed within the domain of caste. Therefore, from ancient times, thinkers conceptualizing and philosophizing caste were also in their own lives divided and ruled by caste.

Depending on its mode of production, each country establishes its own political institutions. Institutions arising in a particular society need not correspond to those framed by others. The caste system, for example, is India-specific, so in the Indian context a valid political philosophy can be woven around the institution of caste. As Karl Marx constructed his political philosophy around class, Ambedkar constructed his around caste: both of them are political philosophers in their own right. In the ancient period all Indian thinkers had to engage with caste, either for or against it. Those who supported it, like Kautilya and Manu, constructed a notion of justice (dharma) to suit their political agenda. The state was assigned the dharmic duty of protecting caste and *varna-dharma*. Thus the central theme of their speculation was meant to establish power relations in such a way that the Dalitbahujan castes and women were completely subordinated to the hegemonic power of brahminical forces. Thus, Kautilya and Manu were systemizers of post-Upanishadic speculation. Gautama Buddha, as a forerunner of Kautilya and Manu, challenged the Upanishadic dharma philosophy. He opposed the caste system and constructed a diametrically opposite notion of justice

(*dhamma*) to speculate and assign a whole range of new tasks to the state and to society. He differentiated politics from religion, science from myth, reason from belief, class from caste, right from wrong. In this process he threw up a whole range of political philosophy that became the foundation of progressive philosophies that have emerged at different stages of Indian history.

So far, the tendency of political scientists has been to follow Western definitions. Such an approach has led to misreading of Indian thought and ideology; and as a consequence much damage has been done to our nation-building. It is, therefore, necessary to de-construct many myths now current about our state and society. In this book I shall make an attempt to depart from many of the set notions and definitions and conceptualize ancient Indian political thought in its own right and its own context. This does not mean I shall avoid comparisons with Western political philosophers; I shall compare Buddha's thought with some of the ancient Western and Indian thinkers to show its striking originality and its historical progressiveness.

The Need to Study Gautama Buddha

As Gautama Buddha was the most radical social revolutionary in ancient Indian history, the study of Indian rational political philosophy should begin with him. But unfortunately neither academic institutions nor political organizations or parties include Gautama Buddha in their syllabi as a political thinker.[13] This has happened for two reasons: (*i*) there is no systematic study of Buddha's political philosophy that puts him in the list of ancient Indian political thinkers, and (*ii*) as I will demonstrate later through detailed analyses of the writings of major colonial and nationalist scholars, Buddha has been and continues to be discussed only as a religious preceptor, hence his ideas, the institutions that he created and his personality have become mystified. Once he had been proclaimed one of the *dasavataras* of Vishnu, the entire Buddhist ideology got subsumed into Hinduism.[14] Even in the field of philosophical study not many attempts were made to analyse and expose the Hindu mystification and deification of the Buddha. As a result, Buddha is revered as a god and not analysed as a political philosopher, though we must remember that he

worked in a particular period and in a particular context. It is in the best interests of Indian society that he should be analysed as a political philosopher, within his own context and his contemporary discourses.

The Need For Demystification

The socio-political struggle of the Indian people, in my view, demands the demystification of great thinkers like Buddha with whom the progressive movements of our history and ideology are linked.[15] This demystification should be done at three levels. First, we have to reconstruct our past in relation to the objective conditions of each contemporary period. The objective conditions of the Indian past have to be studied from the point of view of caste and class, not merely from that of class.[16] The brahminical ideology which created caste institutions believed in deifying every school that emerged to oppose Hindu institutions and the economic structure that lent support to the Hindu order.[17] Unlike in Europe, the superstructure which kept land, industry and all other means of production under its control was abnormally powerful. Brahminism sought to retain its superstructural hegemony through deifying and mystifying counter-cultural ideological schools. Thus, Buddha, Vardhamana, Basaveswara and even a modern social reformer like Veera Brahmam who fought against casteism were deified and mystified.[18] As Buddha is the first great thinker who established an original ideology to counter brahminical philosophy and ideology, the demystification of Indian thinkers should begin with a demystification of Gautama Buddha.

Second, in the process of mystifying counter-cultural schools, the brahminical school mystified even its own thinkers. It is through this process, for example, that the epic writings of Vedavyasa and Valmiki—namely, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*—were also mystified.[19] But at the same time Hindu scholars studied thinkers like Manu and Kautilya only to establish them as 'secular' theorists. As an initial attempt Buddha's philosophy should be examined in contrast to the philosophy of Kautilya and Manu who, though they were not contemporaries of Buddha, broadly fall into the same category of ancient thinkers.[20] Finally, only when we demystify Buddha shall we be able to compare his

political philosophy and ideology with that of the European political philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.[21]

Though a number of European scholars like Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids, Hermann Oldenberg, Rockhill, Richard Fick and others concentrated on studying Buddhism, they also studied it as a religious school. Yet in their studies certain political, ideological and philosophical aspects of Buddha's thought were brought out. Because of the limitations of their methodology even such great Pali scholars have failed to demystify Buddha and project his political philosophy in its true spirit.[22] These scholars have done a commendable job by transiating almost all the Pali *Suttas, Jatakas* and inscriptions into English but have failed to see the ideological role of Brahminism in mystifying such a great thinker. However, their writings provide us sufficient material to reconstruct Buddha's political philosophy.[23] We must, however, remember that all their writings were conditioned by a Eurocentric and colonial approach.[24] Therefore, let us briefly examine in more detail what the colonial and Eurocentric approach is. Indian scholars too are also guilty of lapses and have not paid serious attention to the study of Buddha as a political thinker. We shall examine their failure later.

Colonial Writings on India

The methodology of modern Indian political scientists has largely been conditioned by two factors. One is colonial historiography and methodology, the other is the religious approach of the Hindu nationalist historians.[25] All the European writers including James Mill proceeded with the assumption that Indian thought was monolithic. They took it for granted that those Hindu scholars, with whom they established rapport, were representatives of the entire Indian society. Their 'discovery' of ancient Indian texts such as the *Manu Dharma Shastra* and *Arthasastra* were taken as discovery of an undifferentiated, non-contradictory Indian past.

Colonial political commentators did not see the continuing contradictions in the Indian socio-political process. Once they had categorized it as uncreative and monolithic, its progressive fractures and faultlines were lost sight of. James Mill says,

> Among the Hindus, according to the Asiatic model, the government was monarchical, and with the usual exception of religion and its ministers no idea of any system of rule differed from the will of a single person . . .

On ancient India he comments,

> In the first stage of society the leader in war is also the judge in peace and legal and juridical functions are united in the same person in the first place, there are hardly any laws, and he alone is entitled to judge who is entitled to legislate since he must make a law for every occasion. In the second place a rude people, unused to obedience, would hardly respect inferior authority.

He goes on to characterize Indian thinkers and people as rude, ignorant, and so forth; he condemns as abysmal their capacity to distinguish between good and bad, just and unjust, and alleges that the laws had not been classified at all.[26] These conclusions of the utilitarian thinkers were based on the *Manu Dharma Shastra* and also on their own discussions with Indian Brahmins. Similarly Prof. Max Müller said,

> An Indian never knew the feeling of a nationality and his heart never trembled in the expectation of national applause . . . the Hindus were a nation of philosophers. Taken as a whole, history supplies no second instance where the inward life of the soul has completely absorbed all the practical faculties of a whole people, and, in fact almost destroyed those qualities by which a nation gains its place in history.

The views of Bloomfield do not differ much. He says,

> From the beginning of India's history religious institutions controlled the character and development of its people to an extent unknown elsewhere. . . . There is no provision in such a scheme for the interest of the State and the development of the race.[27]

It appears that Western political scientists never bothered to learn about or to examine the Buddhist tradition. Such a blind, Eurocentric and colonial approach has done a lot of damage to Indian creative thinking. We will see in later chapters how this European understanding was completely misplaced.

Commentaries on and Studies of Buddhism

Some of the first writings on Buddhism came from European Pali scholars like Rhys Davids, Mrs. Rhys Davids, Oldenberg, Rockhill and several others. Rhys Davids' *Buddhist India* is the first work to introduce Buddha to the European world. Furthermore, it put ancient India in a new and non-Hindu perspective. In the preface to *Buddhist India* Rhys Davids writes,

> A first attempt has been made to describe ancient India during the period of Buddhist ascendancy, from the point of view, not so much of the Brahmin, as of the Rajput. The two points of view naturally differ very much. Priest and noble in India have always worked together very well so long as the question at issue did not touch their own rival claims against one another.[28]

Rhys Davids argues that Buddhism was seen as a movement that attempted to undermine the hegemony of Brahmins and promote the interests of Rajputs. Oldenberg's *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order* is another important work that put Buddhist thought in a new perspective. The book is basically a biographical sketch which introduced the broad outlines of Buddhist thought to the European world. But its significance, in the Indian context, lies in its examination of ancient India from the Buddhist point of view.[29] W. W. Rockhill's *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of His Order* also examines Buddha's ideas from a non-Brahmin point of view. This book is a result of a systematic analysis of the *Dulva* or *Vinaya Pitaka* which puts Buddha's theory and practice in a biographical form.[30] Mrs. Rhys Davids had also done much valuable work, the most important being *Outlines of Buddhism.* Written in an excellent style this book introduces Buddhism to European and non-European readers. It made a significant con

tribution to our understanding of the Buddhist literature.[31]

The Perspective of the Hindu Nationalist Scholars

In order to counter the colonial claims that India had no democratic tradition, several Indian nationalist scholars undertook the study of ancient political speculation, including such traditions. The most important among them are K. P. Jayaswal, R. C. Majumdar, D. R. Bhandarkar, U. N. Ghoshal, Beni Prasad, A. K. Sen, N. C. Bandyopadhyaya and P. C. Basu. K. P. Jayaswal's *Hindu Polity*, Bandyopadhyaya's *Development of Hindu Polity and Political Theories*, P. C. Basu's *Indo Aryan Polity*, D. R. Bhandarkar's *Some Aspect of Ancient Indian Polity*, and R. C. Majumdar's *Corporate Life in Ancient India* are some of the earliest writings.[32] All these works were published in the early twenties and they became the basis for formulating Hindu nationalist ideas.

Methodologically speaking, all these writers were victims of the Eurocentric colonial framework set up by James Mill and Max Müller. Though they tried to assert the existence of democratic traditions in India from ancient times, they also operated within the framework of the monolithic paradigm of Hindu identity. Most of the studies were conducted from the point of view of political institutions but not from that of studying an individual thinker's political philosophy. The stress was on Hindu identity and culture. There was no doubt that the emphasis had been shifted away from story and epic narrations to the examination of ideas, but these commentators avoided a systematic discussion of ideological conflicts, contradictions or radical ruptures within the Indian system.

In the very first chapter of *Hindu Polity* Jayaswal writes, 'It is proposed to outline here certain chief features of Hindu polity. The Hindu race [the brahminical Aryan race] has experimented with great and various systems of state and political machinery.'[33] Bhandarkar in his introduction to *Some Aspects of Ancient Hindu Polity* said, 'Following the example of Mr. Jayaswal I delivered in 1918 two lectures on this subject in connection with my first Carmichael Lectures.' And in these lectures he stated, 'It is no longer correct to assert that the Hindu mind did not conduce to the development of the political theories.' Answering the question

that Indians could never separate politics from religion, Bhandarkar said,

> Is it not clear from the enumeration that the Hindu mind sharply and consistently separated polity and also economics from philosophy and theology and regarded it as an independent subject?[34]

Not only Bhandarkar, but also all subsequent Hindu political scientists depended on the same framework. For them all ancient thinking was Hindu thinking. The communal character of Hindu nationalism lies in this approach. A. K. Sen, for example, in the preface to his book *Hindu Political Thought* writes,

> The present book is the outcome of a desire to establish the fact that in realms of political thought, the Hindus were not as backward as some writers try to make out and with this end in view I have examined some aspects of political thought in some detail.[35]

Even Ghoshal's approach did not differ much. It is clear from the statements of these writers that what was uppermost in their minds was the need to prove that Hindu thought had democratic content. Their repeated reference to 'Hindu' was designed to construct European opinions as Christian ones. The consequence was that the whole discourse took on shades of religious conflict, which forced them to treat all Indian political and philosophical schools as part of this Hindu monolith. This is exactly what pushed Hindu nationalist scholars into the trap of Eurocentrism, because, as we have shown, the main thrust of the Eurocentric argument was to prove that there were no contending ideological schools in ancient India. Accordingly, the Indian people obeyed the dicta of Hindu religious authority; therefore, there could never have been secular political schools in ancient India. But the fact was that the Charvaka school and the Buddhist school were basically secular and materialist, and moreover posed a challenge to the Vedic Hindu, brahminical school of thought. Against the Hindu scholars' nationalist religious approach, the Europeans asserted that ancient Greek philosophy was basically secular and

that it operated in the domain of politics. The main weakness of the Hindu nationalist school was that they too depended on the framework and the sources which European scholars drew upon to establish a monolithic Hindu philosophy and identity in ancient India. In other words, both European and Hindu nationalist scholars depended excessively on Manu's laws and Kautilya's *Arthashastra* which by and large presented a monolithic, authoritarian *varnadharma* theory. The only exception to this method during the freedom struggle was that of Ambedkar who examined the contending ideologies of the ancient period.[36] But unfortunately most of Ambedkar's writings did not see the light of day during this period of historical rediscovery. It was only after the Maharashtra Government published his volumes that we realised that in most of his writings Ambedkar treated Hinduism and Buddhism as contending schools of thought.[37]

Post-Independence Discourse

Even in the post-Independence period, there was hardly any attempt by political scientists to re-examine creatively the political theory of ancient India. But we must acknowledge the fact that in the sphere of history and philosophy, some path-breaking works have come out. D. D. Kosambi, R. S. Sharma, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya and Romila Thapar have done significant work, providing us with a new framework to examine the political philosophy of ancient India. D. D. Kosambi, in his *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, outlines the new methodology and writes, 'It is merely a modern approach to the study of India history, written in the hope that readers may be impelled to study that history for themselves.'[38] He has also shown how India was a place of contending schools of thought. The chapter on Buddhism puts the origin and growth of the Buddhist school in a new perspective.

The most important studies that came in the mid-fifties were R. S. Sharma's *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* and Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya's *Lokayata*.[39] Pointing out the methodological limitations of nationalist ideology, R. S. Sharma writes,

> First, while it did serve to rouse the educated middle class against alien rule, it hardly appealed to conscious intellectuals interested in the masses of peasants and workers who were being drawn into the nationalist struggle from 1920 onwards.

One of the reasons for this was the Hinduization of the entire ancient Indian polity. Sharma adds,

> By a fulsome adoration of ancient Hindu institutions it tended to antagonise the Muslims . . . Secondly, it gave us a false sense of past values.[40]

Chattopadhyaya came to the same conclusions about philosophical studies. For the first time he brought to light the fact that before the sixth century BCE itself, several schools like the Lokayatas, Jains and Buddhists had challenged the Vedic and brahminical schools.

Of course the writings of A. S. Alteker and B. A. Saletore, namely, *State and Government in Ancient India*,[41] and *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions*[42] are important works in understanding ancient Indian thought. However, their framework does not differ from that of Jayaswal and Bhandarkar. These two works go a long way in formulating our ideas about Manu and Kautilya and the impact of their theoretical formulations on the shaping of Hindu institutions, but they are basically textbooks and do not throw any new light on the subject. Apart from these academic commentators, one philosopher-cum-theoretician who systematically examined many aspects of ancient India was B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar did not, in fact, view Buddhism as religious philosophy and he counterposed Buddhist philosophy to Hinduism. His exhaustive critique of Hinduism, found in theoretical articles like 'On Caste', 'Annihilation of Caste', 'Philosophy of Hinduism', 'The Hindu Social Order', 'The Ancient Regime', 'The Decline and Fall of Buddhism' and the 'Triumph of Brahminism' changed our very outlook on ancient India.[43] Through these writings Ambedkar provides a new framework to understand ancient Indian political thought from the point of view of the oppressed masses. He also provides us some clues to under-

standing ancient Indian thought through the inner contradictions of Indian society. It is with this perspective that Ambedkar writes his magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

All these works are extremely relevant to the understanding of ancient Indian ideas, politics and institutions. However, while many nationalist and post-Independence writings can give us several clues about Buddha's political ideas no political scientist has so far attempted to weave his ideas into a coherent political philosophy. In the absence of such works Buddha has not been included in the academic curriculum on ancient Indian political thought. This book attempts to fulfil this objective, which will certainly have larger implications for modern political and ideological processes.

NOTES

1. During the nationalist struggle against the British some work was done by historians like R. C. Dutt, Purnendu Narayan Singh K. P. Jayaswal and a few others, but their framework was subject to several limitations. See R. S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Motilal Banarsidass: New Delhi, 1959) pp.1–13.
2. Our own past serves as a guide for us to build up our future institutions. F. Owricks said, 'Unless we have constructive outlook over the past, we are drawn either to mysticism or to cynicism', quoted in E.H. Carr, *What Is History*? (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) p. 109.
3. Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.1.
4. After the V.P. Singh government declared in 1990 that it would implement the Mandal Commission Report, the debate on the caste question has taken a new turn in India. Pro-Mandal scholars began to argue that the abolition of caste has to be put on the political agenda of the country. This led to a re-examination of anti-caste thought. I think Gautama Buddha was the first thinker in ancient India to talk about the dilution and abolition of the caste system. See B. R. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches* (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1987), vol. 3, pp. 441–462.
5. See T. Oizerman, *Problems of the History of Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973).

6. Randhir Singh, *Reason, Revolution and Political Theory: Notes on Oakeshott's Rationalism in Politics* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1967), p. 2.
7. Dev Raj Chanana, *Slavery in Ancient India* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1990). See Foreword by Filliozat, p. 6.
8. George H. Sabine, *History of Political Theory* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH, 1973), 4th ed., p. 14.
9. David Sills, ed. *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, New York, vol. 12, p. 310.
10. W.A. Dunning, *A History of Political Theories*. See Preface (New York, Macmillan, 1950).
11. Sabine, *History*, p. 14.
12. Sills, *International Eneyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, p. 310.
13. In India the study of ancient Indian thought acquired significance during the freedom movement. In post-Independence India departments of political science in all the major universities teach a separate course on ancient Indian thought, but by and large the tendency is to not include Buddha in the list of ancient Indian political thinkers. Political parties do prepare their own syllabi to educate their cadres, but even they do not include Buddha.
14. Hindu mythology suggests that whenever society has strayed from the path of Hindu dharma Vishnu has incarnated himself and killed those who violated the Hindu order. According to this myth Vishnu incarnated ten times, and Buddha's incarnation is the ninth one. Ironically Buddha never believed in the violent methods of moral policing ascribed to Vishnu; all his life he fought such methods.
15. The great advances in indology now give us a lot of scope to reconstruct our past on a more positive, historical and material basis. Sharad Patil's *Dasas, Sudras, Slavery* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1982) has raised several issues about caste and class in India. In view of the increasing anti-caste struggles by the Dalitbahujan masses in India the need to study the political ideology of those who initiated these struggles assumes greater importance. Sharad Patil in Part II of his book discusses Buddha as the initiator of anti-Hindu struggle.
16. According to Sharad Patil, unlike European society, Indian society cannot be studied by applying what he calls the unilineal dialectical materialist method. He feels that since the caste structure is much more complex; to unravel it multilinear methods need to be applied. He made this proposition in a lecture at the Arts College, Osmania University on 28 June 1990. I tend to agree with him; to unfold social reality in India the Marxist perspective has to be combined with the Dalit perspective. This would mean a specific application of dialectical materialism to (non-European) Indian reality.

17. Caste is a brahminical institution based on varnadharma. The modalities of all other institutions like marriage and family are structured by brahminical ideologies to perpetuate caste. Sacrificial ritualism was a method chosen by the brahminical school to perpetuate the caste system and retain their control over the masses. In this process the deification of every person who opposed the caste system served their ideological purposes.
18. Basaveswara belonged to the medieval period, and organized anti-caste struggles in Karnataka in South India. Potuluri Veerabrahmam who lived in the seventeenth century in the Andhra region preached anti-caste principles. See N. Gopi, *Vyasanavami* (Hyderabad: Chaitanya Publications, 1986; nine essays in Telugu), where the author discusses the anti-caste teachings of Veerabrahmam, pp 19–58.
19. Vedavyasa's *Mahabharata* and Valmiki's *Ramayana* contain several philosophical propositions. Modern political scientists study only the *'Shanti Parva'* of the *Mahabharata* as one of the sources of ancient political philosophy. This is an erroneous approach.
20. Kautilya and Manu are now being treated as ancient political thinkers. Kautilya is being studied by political scientists as an ancient political scientist and Manu is being studied as a lawgiver. See Bhasker Anand Saletore, *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions* (Mumbai: Asia Publishing House, 1963) and Somnath Dhar's *Kautilya and Arthasastra* (New Delhi: Marwah Publications, 1981).
21. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are recognized all over the world as the founding fathers of political philosophy. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 25, pp 972–73, *Encyclopaedia Americana*, vol. 22, p. 311, *Colleger's Encyclopaedia*, vol. 19, pp 215–216.
22. T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg have translated many *Suttas;* see *Sacred Books of the East* (hereafter SBE) (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass), vol. 11, 13 and 20. Rhys Davids wrote several interpretive works, important among them are *Buddhist India* (Calcutta: Susil Gupta, [1959] 1909); *History and Literature of Buddhism* (Calcutta: Susil Gupta[1896] 1962); Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Outline of Buddhism* (London: Methuen, 1934); H. Oldenberg, *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order* (New Delhi, Indological Book Houses, 1971) originally published in Germany and subsequently translated into English by William Holy. Neither the year of translation nor the year of original publication are mentioned. W. W. Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of His Order* (Varanasi: Orientalia Indica, 1972). Derived from Tibetan works in the Bkah-Hgyur and Bstan-Hgyur, followed by notices on the early history on Tibet and Khoten; Richard Fick, *The Social Organisation in North East India in Buddha's Time.*
23. For example, Rhys Davids was the first writer to recognize that in

ancient India during Buddha's time, there were clans and nations. He compared the term 'Raja' with the Roman 'Consul' and the Greek 'Archon'. See *Buddhist India*, pp. 12–30. Oldenberg discusses Buddhist dialectics, pp. 176–195. He also discusses Brahminism (171) and the Buddha's criticism of the sacrificial system, p.172. See Hermann Oldenberg, *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order.*

24. By 'Eurocentrism' I mean here that every aspect was studied from the European and colonial perspective. Hindu nationalist scholars like K. P. Jayaswal, R. C. Majumdar and D. R. Bhandarkar dealt with the subject from the point of view of Hinduism. They never had a universal approach to the problems of India.
25. I consider K. P. Jayaswal and R. C. Majumdar political scientists as well as historians because some of their writings were basically political in nature.
26. James Mill, *History of British India* annotated by H. H. Wilson (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1972), vol. 1, p. 141.
27. Both quoted in D. R. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Hindu Polity*, (Varanasi: Benaras Hindu University, 1929), p. 2.
28. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India.*
29. Oldenburg, *Buddha.*
30. W. W. Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha.*
31. Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Outlines of Buddhism.*
32. The pioneering work being K. P. Jayaswal's *Hindu Polity* (Bangalore: Bangalore Printing and Publishing Co., 1978).
33. Jayaswal published *Hindu Polity* in 1924. The essence of this book had been published in 1913 in the form of an article in *Modern Review.* Jayaswal's work was the first of its kind and therefore became the trendsetter; it continues to be read even today. Ibid, p.2.
34. D. K. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Hindu Polity*, delivered in lecture form in 1925 and first published in 1929. See 'Introduction'.
35. Ajit Kumar Sen, *Hindu Political Thought* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press [1924] 1986). See the Preface.
36. See Ambedkar's *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 3. (The Maharashtra government has so far published 13 volumes). He bases his theory on the democratic principles that evolved during the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity, to examine the theory and practice of Hinduism, and concludes that Hinduism was authoritarian and Buddhism a democratic school of thought (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1987), vol. 1.
37. The most important of Ambedkar's works is *The Buddha and His Dhamma.* He drew important lessons from Buddhism in his article 'Triumph of Brahminism' and also in the article 'Buddha or Marx', see *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 3, pp 266–331 and 441–62.

38. D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan [1956], 1999). See 'Preface' to second edition.
39. D. P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1959).
40. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas*, p.12.
41. A. S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1949).
42. Saletore, *Political Thought*.
43. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol 3.

2

Pre-Buddhist Society

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE on Indian history suggests that Indian society was passing through a transition between 800 and 500 BCE. At that early stage of material development, social changes took place slowly and imperceptibly. The primitive agrarian tool system was gradually being transformed. Nevertheless, the changes in this part of the globe appeared to be faster and more intensive when compared to any other part at that point of time.[1] This is where the historical significance of ancient Indian society lies.

For any student of political history of ancient India, the non-availability of a well-documented history of that time is a major problem. Vedic literature presents a social picture of the pre-sixth century BCE. However, since Vedic literature basically dealt with sacrificial hymns and superstitious symbols, it is very difficult to re-construct the social and economic conditions of that society from that literature.[2]

In his introduction to Ratilal N. Mehta's *Pre-Buddhist India*, H. Heras comes to the conclusion that a more reliable source of information to construct that period's socio-political thinking would be the collection of Buddhist stories of the previous births of Buddha, called the *Jatakas*. These stories undoubtedly depict society of a period of time prior to that of Gautama Buddha.[3] Therefore, I have also depended upon the *Jataka* stories to analyse the socioeconomic conditions of the Pre-Buddhist period. Apart from the *Jatakas* I propose to use all available secondary source material to explain the socioeconomic conditions in pre-Buddhist India.

Social Conditions

The Brahmins

A careful study of the literature, particularly of the Buddhist *Jatakas*, indicates that the society at that time was undergoing a great transformation. The fourfold varna (class) system had fully developed at that time, but the caste system based on occupation was in the developing stage. The varna system was loosely based on division of work,[4] but the dispensation was more advantageous to Brahmins than to any other section. The field of education was completely monopolized by Brahmins. The *Uddalaka Jataka* explains the existing varna system as the Brahmins themselves viewed it in one of the *gathas* (songs) as follows:

> Brahmins he made for study; for command;
> He made the Khattiyas: Vessas plough the land;
> Suddas he servants made to obey the rest;
> Thus from the first went forth his high behest;
> We see these rules enforced before our eyes.[5]

In this gatha, which explains the brahminical version of the world, Brahma created the world and he also divided humanity into four varnas. According to brahminical theory the Brahmins were created by Brahma to study; the Kshatriyas to rule; the Vaisyas to plough the land and the Sudras to serve the rest of society. This divine theory of social division implies:

(*i*) The Vaisya class had not as yet taken up trade and business but was still attempting agriculture as the market had not developed. The Sudras were not yet divided into castes, and were basically slaves. The Brahmins reserved education and the interpretation of the world as their prerogative, and the Kshatriyas were assigned military tasks.

(*ii*) Brahminical ideology was developing to a point where it could justify the Brahmins' complete control over society.

This goes to show that the Gangetic plains, where the early civilization of India developed, had not only emerged from tribal-

ism but had already become a class society.[6]

Describing the social position of the Brahmin class Ratilal Mehta says, 'The Brahmins, of all the classes, seem to have formed a homogeneous class, bound together by the consciousness of being premier caste, the only one enjoying the privilege of acting as priest at a sacrifice and by the observance of certain customs, relating especially to *connubium* and *commensality* with a view to preserving the purity of blood and ceremonial cleanliness.'[7]

The Brahmin class, it appears, had become the most organized and the most conscious class by that time. Because of the organized strength of the Brahmins, and also their control over the state and the spiritual domain, the rest of society held them in high esteem. Though class distinction within the brahminical order was emerging, this distinction was of degree, not of kind. For example *Digha Nikaya* mentions that within the Brahmin class 'some were "proper" that is, who corresponded closely to the ideal, sketched in the older scripture and others "worldly" that is, those who did not confirm to the strict rules of their class, and followed all sorts of occupations.'[8] This is but natural in any emerging class society. The puritanic or 'proper' Brahmins slowly pushed the non-puritanic or 'improper' worldly sections which were engaged in other professions into either the Vaisya or the Sudra classes. This goes to indicate that Brahminism by that time was becoming an ideology rather than a religious sect.[9] The formation of a class is accompanied by the creation of its own ideological superstructure, though no doubt that of the Brahmins could not go far beyond a ritualistic framework.[10] But these were the times when from the womb of ritualism non-ritualistic schools were also emerging.

A 'proper' Brahmin is supposed to pass through the four stages of life. When growing up he goes to a teacher, studies the Vedas, then sets up a household, later renounces worldly life and goes to the forest where he lives either as a hermit or surrounded by a host of pupils and ascetics. He quits in course of time to take up the life of an ascetic and lives by begging. The ritualistic Brahmins, as a class, set principles to their advantage. They were slowly gaining enormous political privileges. Because of the privilege of *dana*, namely, the right to receive gifts, Brahmins of the *Jataka* period were acquiring wealth in much greater measure. Not only

kings, but also the people in general were giving gifts to the Brahmins whose services they required at various life-stages such as birth, death or marriage. At certain times, for instance, 'they invited the Brahmins to meals, they came, bathed, and washed their faces, in the meantime the rice was taken from the fire and set to cool down. Then the 'guest water' was given and the dishes placed before them. After finishing the meals they took the gifts, uttered benediction and went away.'[11] It is clear from this practice that by then the Brahmins had become a parasitic class. Both for food and other materials they depended either on kings or on the other classes. However, it appears that in pre-Buddhist India, Brahmins accepted cooked food in non-Brahmin houses. This practice was later given up and Brahmins made every other section untouchable as far as food was concerned. Ratilal Mehta opines that 'whether the Brahmins also enjoyed immolatastability [*sic*] and immunity from execution *(avadhyata)* cannot be determined with precision from the *Jataka* stories. Most probably they were free from taxes.'[12]

The Kshatriyas

As the Brahmins occupied a predominant ritualistic position in the society, the other classes were subdued in ritualistic status. The situation gave rise to the emergence of rebellious groups from the other sections of the society—particularly from the Kshatriya class. The *Jataka* stories corroborate the existence of such rebellious tendencies against Brahmins. Mehta notes that 'the whole of the *Junha Jataka* narrates the shameful behaviour of a Brahman who pours out his wisdom only to fetch a handsome reward from the king. The greediness of the Brahmins is frequently brought out even if we disallow the bitter remarks of the Boddhisatta of the *Bhuridatta Jataka*. The sarcastic name *Odariya* (fond of eating) given to them is interesting'.[13]

The Bhuridatta Jataka, in many gathas, hurls scathing indictments at the Brahmins of the times who caused the slaughter of dumb and harmless creatures 'struggling to the last breath'. Unless a rebellious attitude persisted in some sections it would be difficult to account for such statements in the *Jatakas*. This kind of rebellious consciousness among the non-brahminical forces makes it clear that the position of the Brahmins was shaky in some

respects. Even the kings were not happy with the parasitical life led by the brahminical class. In order to retain their hold at that point the Brahmins had created all sorts of mythical stories and set up demons who had to be worshipped. An incident explained in the *Junha Jataka* goes to prove the existence of kingly antipathy to the Brahmins very well. In this incident King Junha questions a Brahmin who has come to ask for a reward:

'Hast thou a penance [*tapo*] Brahmin, dread to tell,
Or hast thou many a charm [*manta*] and many a spell,
Or goblins [*yakkha*] ready your behests to do,
Or any claim for having served me well?'

This gatha questions the very powers of the Brahmins and attempts to ridicule their divine capacities. At this stage, it appears, the Kshatriyas were asserting their political rights against the ritualistic power of Brahmins. Says Mehta, 'With regard to a Brahman, the Khattiya seems to be conscious of his superiority so much so that King Arindama, for instance, calls Sonaka, the *purohita's* son, a man of low birth and himself he calls *Asambhinnakhattiya Vamse Jato*, born of line of nobles in a family the members of which both on their father and mother's sides were recognised as Khattiyas.' Even in the enumeration of the varnas or existing classes the Kshatriyas put their class first in the order. Discussing this aspect Mehta writes, 'In the enumeration of the castes the Khattiyas are almost always mentioned first: Khattiya, Brahmana, Vessa, Sudda, Chandala-Pukkusa.'[14]

This was the period when the Kshatriyas were gaining access to Vedic and *Shastra* literature; they seem to show as much zeal as the Brahmins in the study of the Vedas and other Shastras. Further, though there is scant evidence to prove it as yet, it can be guessed that Kshatriyas were also forming a class in themselves by the pre-Buddhist period.[15] Commenting on this Richard Fick says, 'The Jatakas understand by a khattiya a member of the ruling class which includes the king, his great lords and vassals along with the higher portions of the army.'[16] It is important to note that the pre-Buddhist period was a time when the Kshatriyas were challenging brahminical ideology and trying to gain control of every social institution. Since Gautama was born into this class he

was well placed to imbibe the spirit of anti-Brahminism.

The Vaisyas

Basically an agricultural class, the status of the Vaisya was below the Kshatriyas and slightly above the Sudras.[17] According to Fick, 'Originally in the oldest Vedic age *Vaisya* was a name of the class of cattle-breeding and land-cultivating Aryan settlers, it served later the purpose of the theorising Brahmins to bind together the unlimited number of social groups.'[18] We do not have any evidence of Vaisyas having access to Vedic studies at that time, nor of the independent identity of Vaisyas in class formation; on the contrary we have evidence to prove that the Vaisyas were nearer to the Sudra slave class. Mehta says, 'we have the instance of one such *Gahapati* who deals with vegetables and fruits. Another Gahapati maintains himself and his mother with difficulty by working as a hired labourer.'

During this period some sections of the Vaisyas and Sudras also formed into a distinct class called Gahapatis or Kutumbikas living a settled family life around patches of fertile land. Mehta is of the opinion that 'the Gahapatis, like the Khattiyas and Brahmans, seem to have distinguished themselves from the great mass of the people by a certain consciousness of position and perhaps also by pride in their descent.'[19] Thus, this emerging new layer of society must have formed itself into a new class over time.

The Sudras

The Sudras constituted vast numbers of people who were the basic toiling masses. By the pre-Buddha era the Sudra class was slowly disintegrating into different artisanal and professional groups. The division of labour in agrarian economy was becoming clear. Apart from the numerous slaves who had no family or settled life of their own, various artisan groups and craft groups were forming themselves into guilds. The fact that the *Jataka* stories mention Gahapatis and Kutumbikas as separate social groups besides Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, among whom family life was well settled, indicates that the Sudra slave masses had no family life of their own, and if there was such life, it must have been fluid and flexible; by brahminical standards not meriting recognition as 'family life' at all. In other words, family life

among the Sudra masses was in a transitory stage.[20] It was also a stage where caste practices were being established even among Sudra artisans and professional groups. Several *Jataka* stories indicate that different professions like potters, weavers, smiths, carpenters, ivory carvers, dancers and musicians who roamed from village to village were slowly settling down. There were also snake charmers and mongoose-tamers who used to make their living out of their professions. There were fishermen and basket makers who were making their living out of fishing and basket making.[21] According to Fick, 'the more in the course of centuries the caste theory obtained currency, the greater the exclusiveness of, and respect for, the leading castes, the more did the manufacturers' corporations become incorporated into the caste order'.[22]

The slaves led a sub-human life in India during that time. As the agrarian economy was in a transitory stage, clearing forests and adapting the land to agriculture was one of the major slave activities. The agricultural system had by then slowly developed into a tribal plot system where individual families marked out a patch of land for their cultivation.[23] However, the major land was under the supervision of Kshatriya families. The rulers employed slaves to do the actual work. Their masters were supposed to give them a bare minimum of food and also shelter in the form of sheds. Sometimes they lived in groups at their master's house.[24]

Untouchability was slowly being introduced by the brahminical masters into society. By establishing this specific practice the brahminical school codified the laws of the various social groups and perfected its control over the Indian system. The Brahmins found it convenient to link the stigma of impurity to the profession of a given group. Of course, all Sudras were untouchables for Brahmins and Kshatriyas. But this culture of untouchability reached its acme when it became applicable even among Sudra caste/class groups.[25]

In the *Svetaketu Jataka* we come across a Brahmin youth who was proud of his caste. This youth on his way comes across a Chandala. 'Who are you?' he asks, and the latter replies, 'I am a Chandala.' At this the Brahmin youth tries to run away from him for fear lest the wind that touches the Chandala's body should touch his own. He cries out loudly, 'Curse you, you ill omened Chandala, get out of the wind,' and goes away quickly to wind-

ward. In several *Jatakas* we come across stories about hundreds of Brahmins who lost their caste; some even commit suicide because they touched Chandalas or they ate or drank food or water touched by them. Discussing the position of Chandalas, Mehta opines that they were not allowed to live within the walls of a town or a village. 'They lived outside (*bahinagare*) the village, by themselves (Chandala gamaka) . . . even, the touch or the sight of a Chandala caused impurity'.[26] Apart from these Chandalas there were other caste groups like *Pukkusas* (cleaners), *Nisadas* (hunters) and so on , who took up all sorts of menial jobs and also there were several other low professional job holders whom Fick calls 'Ethnical Castes'.[27]

Economic Conditions

Advanced civilization and culture developed in India, like in any other country, around the river beds because the economic conditions of the people in such geographical locations were congenial for development. The Ganga-Yamuna and Sindhu plains were rich and fertile with plenty of water, and hence the plentiful growth of rice and sugarcane became possible in this region.[28] It was in these plains that Buddhist ideology could develop. An idea as to what economic conditions provided a viable base for the growth of Buddhist ideology can be found in the *Jataka* stories.

The land was the most important source of human livelihood. Agriculture was transforming itself from primitive tribal to slave-based, advanced agriculture.[29] The use of animal power was slowly gaining usage and importance. Apart from land, the wealth of the *Jataka* times consisted of gold, silver and other precious metals, household gear, kine, oxen, horses, stores of grain and even slaves and hired labourers. The emergence of the *Gamaka* (a small village), *Nigamagama* (a small town), *Dwaragama* (a village near the gate of a city or a great town or a suburb), *Paccantagama* (a border village) suggests that the agrarian economy was advancing. Perhaps the Paccantagamas were military centres where the king's standing army could be stationed to keep a watch at the bordmrs. In the majority of the villages the Gamabhojaka was the village head. Of all the villages the Dwaragamas were the poorest; the head man of the latter was known as *Jetthaka*.

Even the conditions in the Paccantagamas were miserable. By

and large the border villages were new settlements where tribalism was relatively stronger. Because of the mutating nature of the economy, hunger and starvation haunted them constantly, and they were ridden with robbers and marauders. Mehta writes that 'it was for this reason that [some of] these paccantagamas, where it was difficult to distinguish between a rebel and a loyalist, were deserted and were in a ruined state *(Puranagamathana)*'. The economic life of the people on the borders was largely in a primitive stage as we see them making their settlement wherever they could best find their food, dwelling and shelter.[30]

At a time of transition from a primitive mode of living to agriculture, the clearing of forests was one of the main tasks of the toiling masses. The rulers tried to mould their administrative setup so as to force or persuade the people to take up this job on a large scale. At the same time many were enslaved to work on the royal estates and increase production. By the time of Gautama Buddha private peasant ownership of small plots was slowly coming into existence amidst vast estates under royal ownership. When we use the term 'ownership' it must be remembered that this term is not to be understood in the modern sense of 'legal ownership'. Ownership in pre-Buddhist India was rather vague.[31] Quoting from *Jataka* sources Mehta mentions that 'large estates of 1,000 *karisas* (8,000 acres) were not quite unknown'. The *Vassantara Jataka* mentions that in the days of famine and drought when corn did not grow, men who were unable to live took to robbery. Tormented by want, poor people would gather in a king's courtyard and upbraid him.[32]

During the time of the Buddha the system was undergoing a technological transformation as well. Agricultural operations, which till then had used manual power, started relying more on animal power.[33] In *Jataka* literature ploughing was popularly known as 'making two of one', which is referred to frequently. While rice was the main staple food, farmers had by then begun to grow crops such as sugarcane and cotton.[34] Rice production naturally goes with the production of pulses. The *Jatakas* provide evidence of the cultivation of barley, millet, pulses, peas, chickpeas, beans, oilseeds and so on.

Though the rearing of livestock and dairy farming had been introduced by the Aryans in the early stages, in course of time

native tribes also became acquainted with these practices.[35] By the seventh and sixth centuries BCE cattle were being killed in *yajnas* by Brahmins.[36] Though the possibility of using animal power had been discovered, the killing of animals in the yajnas was coming in the way of this potential breakthrough. The beef-eating Brahmin class had a vested interest in killing animals in the yajnas. It is said that in a single *Rajasuya yajna* about 2,40,000 cattle were given as gifts to the officiating priest.[37] Conversely the Kshatriya and Vaisya classes had a political and economic interest in opposing this killing.[38] Naturally such a situation gave rise to conflicts between the Brahmin class on the one hand and Kshatriya and Vaisya classes on the other.[39]

In this process of transforming the techno-economic structure through the advance of agriculture, a basis for small-scale industry was being established in India. The handicrafts and household-centred industries were slowly giving rise to currency transactions—though the barter system was the main mode of trade. Discussing the nature of wealth in the pre-Buddhist period, Mehta says,

> Whatever industrial capital was there, was in the form of tools and implements of the various craftsmen. We may also say that organisation of industry was based on private property and not collective property of land and other means of production.

Finally, there was a considerable differentiation of occupations, most of which had once again become hereditary. This naturally necessitated facilities of exchange. Though we hear of 'a girl working for a garment and a dog being bought for a piece of money and a cloth', money economy had not come into existence.

The pre-Buddhist period seems to have been familiar with mining, though it was not extensive. The *Jatakas* mention a large variety of metals such as gold, silver, copper, brass, iron, lead, tin and various kinds of crystals (*phalita*), diamonds, rubies, pearls and corals. Besides metals, hundreds of mineral substances—*vinaddha*—were known and sought after, such as salt, collyrium, arsenic, yellow orpiment, vermilion and so on. All these would naturally lead us to the conclusion that mining was undertaken,

if by methods which might not be very scientific, in an age prior to Kautilya or Megasthenes. There remains no doubt, however, looking at the various metal-industries, that India of the *Jataka* times was rich in mineral wealth.[40]

The developing mining system and increasing agricultural production were responses to concomitant needs in society. Any ideological force that hindered this development needed to be countered because in order to fulfil these needs production also needed to be augmented. Brahminism, which was a moribund philosophy, was obstructing the emergence of the new economic system. In this context there was a dire social need for a new philosophical system to arise so as to allow the further development of the new productive forces and the classes based on it.

It was in this transition that the basically agricultural class—the Vaisyas—shifted from agriculture to business.[41] The emergence of a professional business class naturally lays the foundation for the primitive accumulation of capital in its embryonic form. But this kind of wealth accumulation cannot be characterized as the development of a capitalist system, because the state in those days was an emerging slave state. Though the state was slowly beginning to collect taxes, it did not invest these taxes in order to reproduce capital. All the gold, silver and grain collected were used to provide royal luxuries and also to maintain emerging state institutions and parasitic classes. Mehta describes the situation of capital as follows,

> Even during the *Jataka* period the state took away a pretty heavy share of the national wealth in the form of taxes, rents, fines, cesses which was squandered to maintain a great number of parasitical professions at the court. There is no trace of state capital being invested in productive concerns.

The other class of people who possessed wealth was the rich tradesmen, the *sethis* or the rich Brahmins who were described as possessing 80 *kotis*. These people also either spent their surplus on luxuries or used it for unproductive purposes like giving alms or hoarding.[42]

Mehta observes, 'The cultural stage of the *Jatakas*, falling as it does midway between the Vedic and the Buddhist periods, em-

bodies in itself the first beginnings, the formation and the process of development of the merchant and craft guilds which, in later times, reached a high water mark of organisation, efficiency and importance, with their own laws, usage and officers'. There is also evidence in the *Jatakas* that professional guilds were slowly forming, providing scope for organized activity by the artisan sections. The *Kumkara Jataka* and the *Alinacitta Jataka* repeatedly mention potters and carpenters who formed guilds to coordinate their work. The *Jatakas* also provide some evidence for the attempts of the artisan classes to organize markets for the sale of their produce.[43]

All this goes to show that the economic conditions of the pre-Buddhist period were ripe enough to support an organized state on the political front. The organized military state can take either a positive direction or a negative direction, depending on the economic and philosophical foundations on which it is based. What is important is to remember that the economic conditions of the people at that time were uneven. The development of agriculture, artisanship, business and trade with small amounts of mercantile capital was taking place on the alluvial plains, while vast masses lived in the tribal mode of economic and political organization.[44] Around Buddha's time the population of the plains would have been smaller than the tribal and semi-tribal groups taken together. So if a political ideology was to emerge at that point of time in opposition to the dominant one, it had perforce to strike a balance in society among the developed, developing and under-developed people.

Political Conditions

The pre-Buddhist political situation is one of the critical questions that need to be studied carefully. Of late a number of scholars have made serious attempts to come to a proper assessment of the period, using various sources like the *Jataka* stories, Vedic and puranic literature and also archaeological evidence to establish historic connections. I will, however, limit my treatment of this to establishing what political conditions gave rise to Buddhism and other contemporary ideologies in opposition to Brahminism.

The transition of state power in India of the pre-Buddhist

period corresponds in a way to the economic and social transition of the peoples' lives. During the time of Buddha the state was in the process of transforming itself from a *mahajanapada* to an imperial state.[45] Till the emergence of the Magadha imperial state the struggles between various mahajanapadas were bitter and bloody.[46] According to Ratilal Mehta the mahajanapada period could be classified as the period between 800–600 BCE. During this period in Northern and North-western India there were sixteen great kingdoms. Of these sixteen mahajanapadas Kasi, Kosala, Anga, Magadha, Assaka, Avanti and Kalinga were the most prominent states.[47] The classification of these kingdoms is supported by evidence in the *Anguttara Nikaya* and the *Bhagavathi Sutta*. Of these Kasi was the most powerful state. According to Raychaudhary, Kasi played a prominent part in the subversion of the monarchy. The Kasi kings were constantly at war with Kosala and other neighbouring kingdoms. Kasi's capital, Benaras, was perhaps the most wealthy urban centre, and the kingdom itself for quite some time was the most prosperous with material wealth and numerous war prisoners turned slaves. According to the *Mahasilava Jataka* one of its ex-ministers, describing the wealth and glory of Benaras, likened it to a good honeycomb untainted by flies. Raychaudhary opines that Benaras in this respect resembled ancient Babylon and medieval Rome, a prize coveted by its more warlike but less civilized neighbours.[48]

Kasi first fell to the Nagas. Though the *Jatakas* portray the Naga invasion as one by *Asuras*, implying both 'demon' and 'non-Aryan', ultimately the Nagas were assimilated into the Aryan population. It is from these Nagas that the first historical dynasty of Magadha—the Sisunagas—emerged.[49] The next series of attacks on Kasi were by the armies of Kosala. The *Ghata Jatakas* inform us that the Kosala king Vasika seized the kingdom of Benaras and took King Ghata prisoner. Ratilal Mehta concludes that the combined evidence of the *Mahasilava* and the *Ekaraja Jatakas* show that the Kosalan king Dabbasena was captured by the ruler of Benaras, Mahasilava, from among his ministers and subjected to severe physical torture as a punishment.[50] The Jataka sources also reveal that the final downfall of Kasi was at the hands of Kamsa as the epithet *Barahasiggaho*, that is, conqueror of Benaras, is a standing addition to this name. According to Mehta, the time gap between

the fall of Kasi to Kamsa and the rise of Buddhism could not have been long because the memory of Kasi as an independent kingdom was still fresh in the minds of the people in Buddha's time and even later, when the *Anguttara Nikaya* was composed.

The mahajanapada period comes to an end with the establishment of the Magadhan empire with Pataliputra as its capital. Bimbisara's victory over the surrounding mahajanapadas assimilated them into one hegemonic state. In a way the crisis was resolved progressively, and an advanced imperial state was formed. Raychaudhary says, 'The chief interest of the political history of the post-Bimbisara age lies in the interplay of two opposing forces, one centrifugal, the other centripetal, viz., the love of local (janapada) autonomy and the aspiration for imperial unity.' The former ideal is best expressed in the words of Manu: 'Subjugation to others is full of misery, subjugation to self leads to happiness'.[51] Furthermore, Raychaudhary comments that the desire to unite under one political authority became manifest as early as the Brahmana period and found expression in passages like, 'May he [the king] be all encompassing, possessed of all the earth, possessed of all life, from the one end upto the other side of the earth bonded by ocean, sole ruler [*ekaraja*].

As the socio-political atmosphere was becoming conducive to the emergence of imperial states, Bimbisara, a prince of the *Haryankakula* group, seized his opportunity. The process of pacifying some of the mahajanapadas and also some smaller states involved bloodshed and destruction. To maintain such a vast state Bimbisara also had to evolve an efficient and planned administration. Raychaudhary says,

> During Bismbasara's period the high officers were divided into several classes: (*i*) Officers in-charge of general affairs, (*ii*) Generals, (*iii*) Judges . . . thus we have reference not only to imprisonment in jail but also to punishment by scourging, branding, beheading, tearing out the tongue, breaking ribs, so on and so forth.[52]

Thus the state was becoming more and more a repressive institution. Of course this was comparable with the evolution of any emerging ancient imperial state.

By the time of Gautama Buddha the state had passed through *ganarajya,* janapada, and mahajanapada stages into proto-imperialism, a fairly developed stage which brought with it all the concomitant negative features. The advanced sate squeezed the slaves to maintain its standing army, administrative setup and so forth. In addition to the brahminical section, the Kshatriya rulers and the horde of armed Sudras who joined the army were also converted into a parasitic class. The Sudra slaves and the emerging peasants had to carry the burden of production on their shoulders. Brahminical ritualism and killing of animals in the sacrificial yajnas made agriculture stagnate. To resolve this crisis and to push the system forward several alternative schools of thought began to express themselves.

Schools of Thought

The official state ideology at that time was Vedic Brahminism, with its main activity of pleasing the *devatas*. Brahminism was slowly dividing society into castes, and trying to explain the relationship between human being and nature in a metaphysical perspective. Other schools arose to counter this. Throughout human history, broadly two schools of thought have contended with each other; the school of metaphysics and the school of materialism.[53] The metaphysical school was always based on religion. The materialist school believed that the being or existence of physical reality is the source of every development and change. A. P. Sheptulin says,

> Only in the first millennium BC however, did materialism become a more or less integral system of views. This was particularly true of India and China. In India, for instance, the philosophical trend *Lokayata* (literally, the views of those who recognise only this world—*Loka*) gained currency as a fully developed materialist system of world view. This school was founded by Brihaspati.[54]

Thus the Lokayata school got worldwide recognition as the first materialist school.

The brahminical school emphasized the relationship between

the body and the *atma;* the body is temporary and the atma (soul) is permanent and is part of nature. The atma is a creation of unknown powers—namely, devatas. Satisfying the devatas is the most important duty of human life on earth. It is around this ritual that the Brahmins evolved the concept of sacrifice, but with time the operationalization of sacrifice had become worldly and brutal. Rhys Davids, quoting Sylvain Levi, the author of the most authoritative work on this subject, says, 'It is difficult to imagine anything more brutal and more material than the theology of the *Brahmanas*. Notions which were gradually refined and clothed with a garb of morality take us back by their savage realism.'[55]

The creation of the concept of atma is not a specific brahminical contribution to philosophy; it corresponded to similar concepts like 'soul' that originated in other parts of the world more or less at the same time. But what is specific to Brahminism is that the application of it was more brutal than that envisaged by other priestly classes of the contemporary world. The result was the creation of sacrificial ritualism, with attendant philosophical concepts like *karma* and *maya*. The brahminical class of India indulged in animal slaughter and wasted huge quantities of wealth in 'satisfying' the devatas.[56]

To reinforce and expand its interest the brahminical class evolved political and ideological concepts like dharma (loosely 'law') and *danda* ('punishment' or 'retribution'). The brahminical dharma is a divisive concept. Basically it implied acceptance of the caste hierarchy, and unequal treatment in day-to-day life was made morally acceptable within the hierarchy.[57] At the same time, to see that no revolt against varnadharma could arise, the concept of danda was created, and this brutalized the state in India from ancient times. The state used danda in an unjust manner to serve the interests of the caste system. For equal crime there was unequal punishment. For the same crime a Brahmin either went unpunished or was punished less, whereas a Sudra got for the same act the maximum punishment.[58]

In the face of such Brahminism three counter schools of thought emerged in India: (*i*) The Lokayata (or *Charvaka*) school, (*ii*) the Jain school and (*iii*) the Buddhist school. The conflict between the brahminical school, and the aforesaid three schools is the conflict between idealism and materialism.[59] Discussing the philosophi-

cal position of the Lokayata school, D. P. Chattopadhyay says,

> Knowledge and volition were conceived as states of an embodied soul and in liberation the soul becoming disembodied [is] as devoid of consciousness. It was but one step further to establish epistemology on a secure scientific basis and assert that it was plain nonsense to talk of a soul apart from the body and that the conception of liberation was at best a deception. This step was actually taken by the Lokayatas or the Charvakas . . . the ancient materialists.

According to the Lokayatas, 'there is no soul (self) separate from the body.' The soul can never exist outside the body nor does it go to heaven. Even human consciousness does not function independently of the body. Consciousness according to them was a subjective reflection of the objective reality. Thus reason which is a developed form of consciousness is also based on objective reality. Lokayatas believed: 'For wherever something exists if some other thing exists, and does not exist if that other thing does not exist, we determine the former thing to be a quality of the latter; light and heat, for example, we determine to be qualities of fire.' Thus, Lokayatas were early materialists who questioned the brahminical metaphysical thinking.[60] A reviewer of Rhys Davids's book, *The History and Literature of Buddhism*, wrote in the national newspaper *The Hindu*,

> In India before the time of the Buddha there were many theories and speculations on the original land of the Aryans and their later settlements. Most of these can be grouped under the heading 'Vedic' meaning that they owe their origin to the beliefs in the original Vedas and in subsequent speculations. Alongside of these religions speculations and in apparent antagonism to them arose non-Vedic and non-religious concepts of 'Lokayatas' and the Sankhya philosophy . . . . Of course, it cannot be denied that Buddhism was in theory as well as in practice a revolt against Brahminism and the Vedic religion.[61]

The second rationalist school that emerged in India as a a senior contemporary of the Buddhist school was the Jain school of thought. The special peculiarity of the Jain standpoint was its *Anekanta-Vada* with which were linked up the logical doctrines callled *Syad-Vada* and *Sapta-bhanginaya.*[62] As a sharp reaction to Vedic ideology, they evolved a complete non-violent ideology, declaring that the nature of the soul in every *jeeva* is the same, therefore killing any animal or plant or human being is morally the same.[63] Discussing this aspect Chattopadhyaya says,

> thus the doctrine amounted to the somewhat commonplace assertion that existing things are permanent only as regards their substance but their accidents or qualities originate and perish. To explain: any material being continues forever to exist as matter, this matter, however, may assume any shape and quality.

He further adds,

> thus, clay as substance may be regarded as permanent, but the form of a jar of clay or its colour may come into existence and perish.[64]

Jainism tried to strike a balance between Brahminism and the Lokayatas but ultimately it polarized into extreme non-violence. In an emergent tribal society, the Jain school did not strike roots because there was no correspondence between the common people's consciousness and the Jain philosophy of individual salvation. In other words, it failed to meet the metaphysical needs of contemporary society.

To counter Brahminism a more balanced and effective philosophy was needed—a philosophy which grasped the contemporary consciousness of the masses, could appeal to the average human psyche, and also give an impetus to social development. Buddhism was a product of these socioeconomic and ideological conditions.

NOTES

1. D. D. Kosambi, *Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976), see the chapter on First Cities, pp. 53–71. See also Jeannine Auboyer, *Daily Life in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967). Also K. Antonova, G. Bongard-Levin, G. Kotovsky, *A History of India*, Book I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), pp. 11–45. The authors systematically examine the nature of the Indo-Aryan and the Ganges Valley civilizations.
2. See Kosambi, *An Introduction*, p. 110. Kosambi was of the opinion that the lack of relevant archaeological findings, the absence of chronological data and the non-availability of records other than ritual or myth make our task hopeless.
3. Ratilal N. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India* (Mumbai: Examiner Press, 1939). This book deals with political, administrative, economic, social and geographical aspects of pre-Buddhist India. Mehta based this major work mainly on *Jataka* stories. See p. vi.
4. The division of work between Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras was not entirely based on production, because the rituals and the priesthood were divorced from productive activity. See Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979), p. 47.
5. Quoted in Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 244.
6. The four varnas—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra—in pre-Buddhist India can be treated as classes. The class system has slowly undergone a change as caste characteristics have been introduced into the Indian social system. In fact the caste system really acquired its present character only when the Sudras got divided into different caste segments. Kosambi says, 'Caste in the pre-Buddha period was probably quite near to the class system that Rosas ascribed to the *Jati* [Rosas, 'Caste and Class in India'. In *Science and Society* 2 (1943)].' But says Kosambi, 'its stronghold was nearer the Indus Valley than Magadha, and it was extremely rigid and conservative.' In many of his articles on ancient India, Kosambi uses the terms 'caste' and 'class' interchangeably. At times he uses caste/class so that exact definitions are avoided because the Indian reality with regard to 'class' has always been complex. Kosambi in fact states 'caste as class on a comparatively primitive level of production after the agrarian settlement, is also easily proved. Transition from tribe or guild to caste means primarily enrolment of the group in a hierarchical scheme of general society under Brahmin sanction.' But it is better to understand this usage only as a class category so far as the pre-Buddha period is

concerned. Also see R. S. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), pp. 16–19.

7. Mehta has also used the terms 'class' and 'caste' interchangeably. See Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 244–264.
8. A. J. Sayed, ed., *D.D. Kosambi on History and Society: Problems of Interpretation* (Mumbai: Dept of History, University of Bombay, 1985) pp. 28, 29.
9. Kosambi very aptly sums up the situation. He says 'Brahmin ritual, moreover, was not just witch doctor's mumbo-jumbo, but accompanied a practical calender, fair meteorology, and sound working knowledge of agricultural techniques unknown to primitive tribal groups which never went beyond the digging-stick or hoe. But this kind of social position of the Brahmins becomes possible only when a social group forms itself into a class.' See Sayed, *Kosambi*, p. 29.
10. Kosambi also notes 'Without these superstitions assimilated by Brahminism at need, tribal society could not have been converted peacefully to new forms nor free savages changed into helpless serfs.' Had Brahminism not emerged as an ideological school, perhaps the intensive campaign they have carried out among tribal sections would not have been possible.
11. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 247–248.
12. Brahmins stopped accepting food at non-Brahmin houses in pre- and post-Buddhist India and the practice continues today.
13. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 246, 248, 251, 254. This word 'immolestability' occurs in the original and appears to be a typographical error for 'immolestability', or the Brahmin's impunity before society and the law.
14. Mehta seems to have used the term 'Khattiya' to mean Kshatriya as used in Pali language. I am also using it in the same sense. See Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 253-254.
15. According to Romila Thapar, 'During the time of Buddha a major change in the agrarian structure was the emergence of large estates owned by individual Kshatriya families.' See Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p. 43.
16. Fick, *Social Organisation*.
17. R. S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), p. 74.
18. Fick, *Social Organisation*, p. 252.
19. The term 'Gahapati' was used as a synonym for 'Vaisya'. See Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 255.
20. All over the world slaves were not allowed to have their own family life even when the master class had such a life. Even in India this could have been true. Though the nature of the slave system in India was

different in form, it was certainly not so in content. According to Engels, in prehistoric local wars defeated people would be killed and their flesh used to be eaten in the early stages, but later winners, instead of killing the defeated, enslaved them whereby their labour was forcefully used for the betterment of the slave owners. A settled family life for slaves was considered a hindrance to the free use of slave labour by the slave-master. It appears that slaves were only able to have their own family life when society was transformed into the first stage of feudalism. The Sudras of India must have passed through more or less the same stages. The subsequent transition was from individual chattel life to family bondage. Such family bondage can be seen even now.

21. Some *Jataka* stories mention the names of several artisan groups but only in Buddhist *Suttas* do we come across a vivid description of various castes. See Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*.
22. Quoted in Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 257.
23. Sharma, *Sudras*, p. 52.
24. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 261–262. Also Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p. 43.
25. Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p. 47. An examination of the present practices among the Sudras comprising Sudra upper castes, Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes we realize that even Backward Classes like washermen, barbers and sheep breeders treat SCs as untouchables. This practice also must have been there in the ancient period.
26. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 261–262.
27. Quoted in Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 254.
28. Ibid., p. 182.
29. Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 118.
30. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 182
31. Whoever was cultivating a particular piece of land was treated as the owner. This was possible because vast areas of forest lands were available for clearing off.
32. *Vassantara Jataka*, p. 401. Quoted in Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 186.
33. Sharma, *Material Culture*, see chapter 7.
34. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 401.
35. Kosambi tells us that the Sudras were converted into Dasas, and while working as Dasas they learnt all the trades. See Kosambi, *An Introduction*, p. 98.
36. Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 119.
37. Sharma, *Ancient India* (Delhi: NCERT Publication 3, n.d.) p. 58.
38. See Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 103. Archaic verses ascribed to the Buddha read, 'Cattle are our friends, just like parents and other

relatives, for cultivation depends upon them.' Such feelings appeared to have been shared by the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, and not by the beef-eating Brahmins.

39. The conflict first expressed itself in the form of building an anti-Vedic movement. This trend is best expressed in the discussion of Uddalaka Aruni and Setaketu. See, *Setaketu and Uddalaka Jatakas*, III, pp.231–237, Jataka, IV, pp.297–304, quoted in Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 329.
40. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 182, 192–193.
41. The development of agriculture and mining naturally entails the exchange of goods and commodities. According to Mehta, by the time of the *Jatakas*, the manufacturing of textiles, spinning and weaving had developed. Metals and metallurgy, including the use of precious metals in jewellery were widely known. See Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 191–211. Also see R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969), pp. 9–91. According to Majumdar there is evidence to show that there were organized activities by traders in the ancient period.
42. *Koti*: ten million, the modern 'crore'. Mehta quotes extensively from various *Jatakas* to establish some of his theoretical assumptions on formation of capital. See Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p.211; also see *Jataka*, III, p. 101.
43. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 212. Also see Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p. 44.
44. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 214. Also see Thapar *Ancient Indian Social History*, p. 70. Thapar thinks that the proliferation of sects (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) was due to the break-up of tribal society.
45. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 61–67.
46. Kosambi, *An Introduction*, p. 155.
47. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 61. Also see Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 23, D. R. Bhandarkar, *Carmichael Lectures*, 1918 and H. Raychaudhary, *Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta: Macmillan, 1932), 3rd ed., pp. 67–68.
48. Raychaudhary, *Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1972), 17th ed., pp. 61, 63, 66.
49. The early Buddhist conception of the Nagas was similar to that of the Brahmins. According to them the Nagas were non-Aryans and hence the conflict between Nagas and non-Nagas was described as Aryan-Asura conflict. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 66.
50 For an account of these philosophical trends see D. P. Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1979).
51. See Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 25 and Raychaudhary, *Political History*, p. 110. Also see Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 67.

52. Raychaudhary, *Political History*, p. 164, also 5th edn, p. 208. Also see Auboyer, *Daily Life*, p. 59. Based on the *Jataka* description of the ancient prison system it can be said that prisons were fearsome establishments in which life was made unbearable for the inmates. According to Auboyer many prisoners died from the torture inflicted upon them and the privation they endured.
53. See Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy*, 'Idealism vs Materialism', pp. 101–106.
54. A.P. Sheptulin, *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), p. 33.
55. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 108.
56. The implication of the atma concept is that the body is separate from the soul. The atma has a permanent existence whereas the body is temporary. And the atma is governed by a god; therefore appealing to the god from time to time is important. The brahminical forces relied mainly on this philosophical concept of atma to subdue the Sudra masses. See Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy*, p. 185.
57. Auboyer, *Daily Life*. According to Auboyer karma is related to the theory of dharma, which is at once law, religion and moral order. See Saletore, *Political Thought*, pp. 15–24.
58. See Auboyer's chapter on 'The Social Structure and its Religious Principles', in *Daily Life*, pp. 21–37. Also see Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 224–265.
59. See Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 3. Also see Chanana, *Slavery*, pp. 87–104, and Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 248.
60. See Sheptulin, *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy*, p. 33, where he says that the Lokayatas harshly criticized the religious beliefs that were then popular in India and were based on the Vedas. They resolutely opposed all forms of magic and superstition and exposed as false the priest's dogmas about the immortality of the soul.
61. See T. W. Rhys Davids, *The History and Literature of Buddhism* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1975), 6th ed. Press opinion as Introduction.
62. Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy*, p. 132.
63. Chatterjee and Datta, *Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, pp. 73–111.
64. Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy*.

3

Gautama Buddha's Life and Philosophy

THE CONDITIONS OF BIRTH, family circumstances and childhood experiences all have a part in moulding the thinking processes of an individual. It is important to study these conditions and experiences, economic and political influences—in short, the material conditions of a life—because these conditions make an individual what he or she is.

In studying the life of a thinker like Gautama Buddha there are a number of constraints which the scholar must keep in mind. The art of biography had by no means developed in Buddha's time. Furthermore, immediately after his death not much was recorded about his personal life. Some early writing on him was done by Asva Ghosha though this can hardly be described as a biography.[1] In modern times, particularly in the colonial period, Western writers have made efforts to study the life of Buddha, among them Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg, though apart from these two scholars not many historians have made efforts towards such a study.[2] This does not mean that Indian historians have not done any work in this area, but unfortunately much of what is done, is based on the work of Asva Ghosha, Rhys Davids and Oldenberg and most of it is done from a religious point of view. Notwithstanding the non-availability of adequate and systematic material on Buddha, there is, nevertheless, a need to re-examine his life on the basis of whatever material is available in order to identify the factors that influenced his thinking.

Childhood

Buddha's original name was Gautama. He was the son of Suddhodana and Maya Devi. Though there are different views about the

year in which he was born, historians broadly agree that he lived in the middle of the sixth century BCE. Oldenberg, in order to avoid controversy about the year, says, 'The noble boy Siddhartha was born in the country and the tribe of the Sakyas somewhere about the middle of the sixth century before Christ.'[3] Natarajan has estimated that Buddha lived between 565 BCE and 485 BCE, but he cautions that the precise date is still a matter for speculation.[4] For the purpose of our analysis it is enough to know that he belongs to the middle of the sixth century BCE. Kenneth J. Saunders says, 'The boy was born probably about 560 BCE at a place between the capital of the Sakyas and that of the Koliyas.' The garden where Gautama was born bears the name 'Lumbini'. Emperor Ashoka erected a pillar there with an inscription saying, 'Here the Exalted One was born'. It is said that seven days after the child's birth Maya Devi died. Suddhodana had several wives and one of the younger ones, Maha Prajapati, brought Gautama up without giving him any scope to feel the loss of his mother.[5]

By the sixth century BCE the Aryan and Mongolian invaders had established themselves along the lower slopes of the Himalayas and had spread to the Ganges Valley. The Sakya tribe was living on the lower slopes of the Himalayas, where Gautama's father had acquired the status of a small ruler. Oldenberg comments that the kingdom of the Sakyas was one of the small aristocratic governments that had maintained themselves on the periphery of the greater Indian monarchies.[6] These were the times when the small monarchical states were being crushed by the big states: 'Big fish were eating the small fish', giving rise to the famous ancient legal concept of *matsyanyaya*, or 'Rule of the Fish'.[7]

Historical accounts inform us that Gautama spent his youth at Kapilavastu. The city was apparently a densely populated place, in the narrow streets of which thronged elephants, carts, horses and men. It is said that Gautama's childhood was surrounded with all the comforts that a royal child could have had. As he was the child of Suddhodana's old age the king took a lot of care to see that the boy was brought up in sumptuous surroundings. According to Saunders 'Suddhodana desired the boy to succeed him in the leadership of the clan, for the Sakyas seem to have been led by a hereditary chief, not like their neighbours, the Licchavis, by a *nayaka*, elected to the post.'[8] It appears that in the early stages of

Gautama's life different political systems existed in different regions. Some rulers were elected and others became rulers through inheritance.[9] Gautama's family seemed to have believed in the hereditary principle. The Licchavi dynasty elected its ruler in what must have been a sort of tribal democratic state. But all these states were on the verge of collapse as the imperial monarchical state was about to emerge at this time.

Gautama wandered in rich and fertile lands. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people and also of the Sakya dynasty. The fact that Gautama's father's name itself was Suddhodana (pure rice) indicates that rice cultivation was already known to the contemporaries of Gautama. It appears that Gautama was an ardent lover of nature. He appears to have grown up in luxury, as he used to tell his disciples, 'I wore garments of silk, and my attendants held a white umbrella over me'.[10] But these personal riches, pleasures and royal training did not deter him from observing society in general. The life of the common people in his society was miserable in many ways. Society was divided into four classes: (*i*) Brahmins, (*ii*) Kshatriyas, (*iii*) Vaisyas and (*iv*) Sudras.[11] As we have examined in the preceding chapter, the Brahmins were performing yajnas in a big way. The Sudras were being divided into several castes. Brahmins now held the pivotal position both in the domain of ideology and also in worldly affairs. Though there are vague references to Vedic education during his times, we do not have any evidence to suggest that Gautama himself was given systematic training in the Vedas.[12] Though Brahmins were playing the roles of ministers and advisers to the kings, there were areas of serious conflict between Brahmins and Kshatriyas.[13] The main responsibility of administering the emerging state was on the shoulders of the Kshatriyas. The economic life of the people, at that time, was increasingly crisis-ridden. Agriculture had developed problems, as shifting cultivation could no longer support the burgeoning population. Though the use of animal power had been discovered, the killing of animals in the yajnas prevented its practical implementation.[14] According to Kosambi, 'Both agriculturists and traders suffered from the constant warfare which was regularly preceded by Vedic yajnas or fire sacrifice.[15] Secondly, the beef-eating Brahmin class had a vested interest in killing the animals in the yajnas. Through

this means they were getting quality food without investing any labour in the process. Conversely, the Kshatriya and Vaisya classes had a political and economic interest in opposing the killing. Naturally, such a situation gave rise to conflict between the Brahmin class on the one hand and the Kshatriya and Vaisya classes on the other.[16]

The growing population and the crises in agriculture must have pushed the vast masses into continuous starvation, misery and even death. Added to this, the state was in transition when Gautama was a child. The mahajanapadas were forcefully being brought under the hegemony of the imperial monarchical state. To achieve this massive task, wars were being continuously fought, in which hundreds and thousands of people were dying.[17] According to N. C. Bandyopadhyaya,

> Within a century the imperialistic movement assumed greater strength and the face of the country was entirely changed. Hardly had Buddha closed his eyes, when his kinsmen, the Sakyas, were exterminated as a race and within a short time the rising power of Magadha destroyed the political importance of the Licchavis. Gradually one by one the small tribal democracies and later on the greater principalities like Kosala and Avanti all disappeared to make room for the extension of the Magadha monarchy, which like an all-absorbing Leviathan swallowed up its weaker neighbours.[18]

The transition was also affecting the basic mode of production. The use of the ploughshare—wooden and iron—was bringing about a revolutionary change in agrarian production. It appears that on the one hand the change was being resisted by brahminical forces, and on the other, attempts were being made to corner the fruits of the advancing production by the same class.[19] For a sensitive boy like Gautama the miserable conditions that were being created by this transition must have been painful to experience. Though traditional historians say that Gautama's renunciation was based on his subjective feeling towards the diseased, the old and the dying, this kind of explanation is no longer satisfactory. The following excerpt from Rockhill indicates what really

moved Gautama:

> Suddhodana heard from his son of what appeared to trouble so much his mind. So to divert his attention he sent him to a village to look at the plough-men. But there he saw labourers with hair erect, uncovered hands and feet, their bodies dirty and running with sweat, and the working oxen pricked with iron goads, their backs and rumps streaming with blood, hungry and thirsty, panting with fast beating hearts burdened with a yoke which they had to drag great distances, flies and insects biting them, with bleeding and suppurating wounds, the ploughshare wounding them, running at the mouth and nose, covered with gadflies and mosquitoes. His tender heart was touched with compassion. 'To whom do you belong?' he asked the labourers. 'We are the King's property,' they answered. 'From today you are no longer slaves; you shall be no longer servants; go wherever you please and live in joy.'[20]

This story indicates two things: one, by then the land and the Sudra slaves were considered to be the king's property and the condition of the slaves was deplorable. Two, at that time draught animals were being used for agricultural production and the tools of production were absolutely under-developed. This system of agriculture and the condition of slaves and oxen not only pained Gautama but awoke in him a determination to liberate them. Saunders argues that in his childhood the boy 'would listen eagerly to the latest tales of some terrible punishments inflicted by the autocrat, or of some ambitious project for subduing neighbouring states.' He also tells us that the 'rulers cause them [the people] to be seized and condemn them to various punishments, such as, to be flogged with whips, sticks or switches; to have their feet cut off; or to have both their ears and nose cut off or they are bathed with boiling oil, torn to pieces by dogs, impaled alive or beheaded.' Saunders further observes,

> 'The boy [Gautama] would discover, too, the growing rivalry between the great states of Magadha and Kosala which has been called the leading point in the politics of the day;

> for the kingdom of Kosala had made rapid progress and a great struggle was imminent between it and Magadha. He could not help learning that the rival kings attached great importance to the allegiance of such clans as the Sakyas and Licchavis. It was indeed by the help of the latter that the king of Magadha eventually obtained supremacy.'[21]

This socio-political situation made a strong impact on Gautama.

Youth and Marriage

At a very young age Gautama married Yashodhara and had a son called Rahula.[22] At the same time there was a serious change in his thinking. Many human tragedies appeared to him both miserable and avoidable. Tribal peoples were emerging out of tribalism and settling in the plains, posing a serious threat to the emerging monarchical states, and the monarchs in turn were killing thousands of them in brutal wars. The Brahmin ministers were working out plans to divide and subdue the tribals.[23] The question that bothered Gautama very much was—can wars not be avoided? The second disastrous situation that troubled him was the epidemics in which hundreds of thousands were dying. So the question that bothered him was—is there no way to avoid the deaths due to epidemics? The third thing that was bothering him at that time was that because of large-scale food scarcity many people were dying. Forest reserves were being depleted. Agriculture was not developing to meet the needs of the people.[24] The final problem that now began to bother Gautama was how to resolve the question of development.

Apart from this, as traditional histories indicate, he may also have come across individuals suffering from disease, old age, mental disorders and so on, but this in itself would not have been enough to convince him that he should renounce his princely life to find a solution to all the socioeconomic problems of state and society.

Gautama's Renunciation

The day Gautama had to take the agonizingly hard decision whether he should continue as a prince and take over the reins of

state or whether he should dedicate his life to something serious was a momentous one for him. If he were to ascend the throne, as a ruler he would have to do whatever was needed in order to preserve and strengthen his kingdom. Wars were unavoidable in order to maintain and expand the state, as several other states were also expanding in direct competition with the Sakyas. The state of Magadha was becoming more and more aggressive. It was also an age when renunciation for the sake of acquiring wisdom and heavenly powers was very common. Sages and rishis had acquired social status and respectability.[25] Gautama decided to give up the princehood and wander in search of knowledge to discover some solution to the major problems that the people were encountering in those days.

Oldenberg describes how he left his home.

> Before hastening away, he thinks of his new born son, 'I will see my child'. He goes to his wife's chamber, where she was sleeping on a floor couch, with her hand spread over the child's head. Then the thought occurs to him 'if I move her hand from his head to clasp my child, she will awake; when I shall have become Buddha, I shall return and see my son.'

Oldenberg further says that he went 'while still young, young in years, in the bloom of youthful strength, in the first freshness of life. The ascetic Gautama, although his parents did not wish it, although they shed tears and wept, has his hair and beard shaved, has put on yellow garments and has gone from his home into homelessness.'[26] From the day he left home, Gautama wandered restlessly, thinking about the problems that had been bothering him all these years. Of course when he left home he was only 29, but even at that young age his mind had grown enough to think seriously about the problems that beset the people around him.[27]

For seven long years he inquired and investigated intensely into socio-political problems. In the seventh year as he seriously meditated, searching for answers to these questions, Gautama felt that he had finally arrived at some of the answers. However, he did not become enlightened all of a sudden. At one stage, as he was meditating he became skeletally thin. The ascetic life in India used to be so harsh that one of the autobiographical stories of a

saint recounts,

> 'Like wasted withered reeds became all my limbs, like a camel's hoof my hips, like a wavy rope my backbone, and as in a ruined house the roof-tree rafters show all a-slope, so sloping showed my ribs because of the extremity of fasting. As in a deep well the waters' gleam far below is scarcely to be seen, so in my eye-sockets, the gleam of my eye-balls, far sunken, well-nigh disappeared and as a severed gourd uncooked and left out in the sun becomes rotten and shrunken, so hollow and shrunken became the skin of my head. When I touched the surface of my belly my hand touched my backbone and as I stroked my limbs the hair, rotten at the roots, came away in my hands.'[28]

Gautama's situation was no different.

> 'He almost did succumb, so much so the messengers hurried to Suddhodana to tell him that his son was dead. But with splendid sanity Gautama realised at the eleventh hour that self-torture was not the road to enlightenment, that he had been 'trying to tie the air into knots'. Though it meant parting company with his disciples who left him 'when he was most in need of sympathy', he took food and returned to a more normal way of life. He ceased to be a *tapasa* and became *paribrajaka* (wanderer).'[29]

In any process of learning there will be ups and downs; Gautama also had to undergo the process of setbacks and successes. After Gautama gave up penance, he went wandering once again. Finally he realized that a new system of principles had to be created and all those principles which promoted stagnation had to be countered. Though it is said that Gautama acquired *jnana* at Bodh Gaya perhaps that was merely the place where he announced that he had become aware of the answers to some of the questions preoccupying him.

However, what is important is that in this process of learning Gautama's disciples doubted his seriousness and deserted him several times; for example when he realized that fasting continu-

ously over days and months would not give him the required knowledge of things and events. He decided to give up fasting in order to gain enough strength to wander and observe the world. But those who followed him interpreted this switching of methods as indicative of a lack of seriousness. Gautama, however, proved that he was in earnest and his purpose was firmly in his mind. According to Saunders, 'At the end of these six terrible years the great day of his Enlightenment was at hand. Turning aside to a great grove of trees close by the river (the place is now called Bodh Gaya) he slept in this shade, defeated, discredited and abandoned; and there the truth came to him.'[30]

Though Saunders describes what Gautama acquired as the 'Truth', concepts like 'truth' and 'untruth' are relative. Though such concepts are used in both religious and political discourses, the Buddha's realization of truth was political rather than religious. What Gautama realized in the process of his search was that his questions and answers were totally linked to social and political problems. The answers that he began to give, starting with his first teaching at Sarnath, were the answers that he had acquired over a period of seven years of self-search. This is where Gautama's departure from the brahminical paradigm of the rishi actually lies. In fact, it is wrong to describe Gautama's seven-year struggle as *tapasya*. The method of tapasya invariably involves the invoking of supernatural powers and an appeal to god (according to the Hindu theology either to Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, or to any of the incarnations of these gods) by an individual for salvation. In the entire course of Gautama's search for truth there is no such appeal to god whatsoever. And nowhere does the question of god's *varam* (gift) to him come up for discussion. One can see this silence and indifference to religious concepts like god from his early days of self-search. In fact what Gautama had undergone during that period was rigorous training and concentration so that the body and mind are honed to a particular method of living and thinking. In the modern period, Gandhi undertook similar training in a slightly modified form. But Gandhi's method of self-training involved the concept of god. While Gautama tried to move from metaphysical thinking to materialist thinking, Gandhi tried to revert to metaphysical thinking at a time when materialism had been well entrenched in political thought.[31] This is where

Gandhi's retrogressiveness lies, and, to a large extent, the progressiveness of Gautama.[32] However, unlike the rishis, Buddha and Gandhi had one similarity in that neither withdrew from the socio-political life of their societies even after embracing their own versions of renunciation.

Gautama later told his disciples that 'though skin, nerves and bones should waste away, and life blood itself be dried up, here sit I till I attain enlightenment'.[33] He further says, 'When this knowledge had arisen within me, my heart and mind were freed from the drug of lust, from the drug of rebirth, from the drug of ignorance. In me thus freed, arose knowledge and freedom, and I knew that rebirth was at an end, and that goal had been reached'.[34] What Gautama says in his own words goes to indicate that he had reached a stage, at Bodh Gaya, where he began to realize that the answers to certain philosophical questions like 'lust', rebirth, ignorance and lack of freedom—were related to the state and its power. Along with emerging state power the greed for private property and power had been increasing, bringing with it destruction and loss of life. Ignorance of things and issues was breeding insecurity and fear. The scientific knowledge of the time could not explain natural phenomena such as rain, thunder and lightning in rational scientific terms. Superstition prevailed, promoting faith in rituals. There was a need to explain the role of all these natural forces to the people in a systematic way. Gautama must have thought seriously about some method to dispel ignorance. The question of freedom was not only philosophical but also political. The natural freedom enjoyed by the people was getting eroded with the emergence of the imperial state system. Gautama seemed to have found an answer to this 'erosion of freedom' in his *sangha* system, which we shall discuss in detail later.

The fourth aspect for which he felt he had found an answer was the question of rebirth. The concept of *punarjanma* was, perhaps, gaining ground in those days. The Hindu religion juxtaposed the ideas of *papa* (sin) and *punya* (virtue). Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism maintained that sinners are reborn. However, it also preached that the purpose of such rebirth was to redeem past sins and, furthermore, that strict observance of the Vedic rituals in this life would destroy sin and allow the sinner to atone without

rebirth. The Hindu religion propagated the idea that some sinners would be reborn as dogs, as pigs or other low forms of life. The implication was that even being born as a Chandala or as a Sudra itself was an indication of having committed sin in an earlier birth. So the Brahmins, saints and sanyasis had a vested interest in making the question of rebirth central to Hinduism. In order to counter the brahminical theory of rebirth Gautama discovered a new interpretation. His answer was that rebirth can be avoided by resorting to right speech and right action. Neither of these concepts—right speech or right action—involves any brahminical rituals. This is perhaps Gautama's most important philosophical contribution of in his time.[35] After this torturous course of self-realization, Gautama became the wise man who was from then on called Buddha. The transition from Gautama to Buddhahood marked a very important phase in his life and also in the history of Indian philosophy.

The beginning of Buddha's preaching started with self-assertion. He himself was emphatic that he became enlightened. He declared of himself in the following words,

> 'In all the worlds there is no one but me who knows how to break through the web of the passions, to still the waves that waft beings from one state into another, to save them from the whirlpool of miseries, to put an end to concupiscence and break its sting, to dispel the mist of ignorance by the light of truth and thereby lead them to the true state of *nibbana*.'[36]

This kind of self-assertion seems to have been necessary in those days. The credibility of a teacher had to be first established through his own confidence. For example, five monks left Gautama when he stopped fasting. When Gautama approached them after he became Buddha at Banaras, they tried to ignore him.[37] They wanted to call him merely 'friend Gautama'. But Gautama refuse to be addressed by that name, asked them to call him Tathagata and began to instruct them, giving them the discourse known as *Dhamma Chakka Ppabattana Sutta* (the rolling of the victorious wheel or the wheel of land).

The Origins of Buddha's Philosophy

Beginning with his Deer Park speech Gautama started his regular teaching and began to establish the sangha. It is here that Buddha declared his Eight Principles called the 'Noble Eight-Fold Path'—Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindedness and Right Rapture. The origins of Buddha's philosophy lie in this Eight-Fold Path. According to D. D. Kosambi, 'the core of Buddhism is the Noble Eight-Fold Path'.[38]

In fact, for the first time Buddha stated that the 'universe is orderly and that there is a key to its working'. This statement had larger implications for epistemology because society at that point was passing through a complex process of understanding 'nature' and its relationship to human beings. The key to the working of the universe had not then been grasped by anyone; it was, in a way, discovered by Buddha. His Eight-Fold Path had also come to acquire the name of 'Middle Path'. Why was the Buddhist thought called the Middle Path? If this was the Middle Path what were the right and left paths in the ancient period? The Vedic religion was deity-based and had become a stumbling block in the way of the growth of human knowledge. Its theory of karma was not yet fully developed but it was in the process of development. However, the Vedic concepts of karma, sin and rebirth were not sufficient to give answers to many questions which were bothering the inquisitive mind. In other words, Vedic Brahminism had become a reactionary school whereas the people's aspirations were growing beyond it.[39]

Much before Buddha two schools of thought, the Charvakas and the Jains emerged to challenge the ritualistic positions of Brahminism. The Charvakas tried to explain everything in purely materialist terms, completely denying the existence of supernatural entities. Every small event was sought to be explained in terms of its material relationships, and that too in an unintelligible way. Naturally at that stage of human development people did not understand such an explanation at all, and consequently the Charvakas did not attract the popular imagination.[40] The Jain school emerged slightly before the Buddhist school, and proposed observance of complete non-violence against the violent Vedic

yajna performances.[41] Not only was the killing of animals for consumption and other purposes opposed, but even the killing of insects in the process of one's own work was seen as indulging in violence.[42] A long time before the Jain school split into the *Digambara* (living without clothes) and *Swetambara* (having only white clothes on one's body) schools, Vardhamana Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, practised nudity.[43] Nudity and total non-violence were adopted as part of the Jain practice, but apart from this, the Jain school had nothing concrete to offer to people on the increasing complexities of the Indian system and the state and its administration. On the other hand, the Vedic religion was urging that the state and administration were a creation of god's will and pleasure. Even the brutality that was taking place was being justified in the name of *sanghatitha rajya*.[44] The Vedic varnadharma concept was being justified in spite of the fact that it was establishing matsyanyaya. Against this backdrop there was a need to explain many things keeping in view the average consciousness of contemporary society. Yet Mahavira took such an extreme position that he emphatically denied the existence of god and also refused the significance of the material world. Furthermore, he did not have a systematic explanation for any serious problem. It appeared to many of his contemporaries as if Vardhamana was arguing for argument's sake and practising for practice's sake. As a result the Jain school did not strike deep roots into Indian soil.

It was at this juncture that Buddha worked out his Middle or Eight-Fold Path. By formulating it, he created moral confidence among his disciples and also among the general public. Unlike the Charvakas he explained his philosophical outlook in terms of nirvana, and he conceptualized his notion of nirvana in an altogether new way, so that it could not be equated with the Vedic concept of *moksha*.[45] Of course, the concept of punarjanma was very prevalent in ancient India, as the Vedic religion was propagating it in relation to god.[46] According to the Vedic religion one can avoid punarjanma only by pleasing the gods. Buddha changes the logic by saying that nirvana can be attained by doing good to one's fellow human beings.[47] The key to nirvana lies in observing his Eight-Fold Path. Thus Buddha had shown that in order to avoid punarjanma one need not resort to appeasing unknown gods but must start helping to improve material conditions, and

must avoid doing injustice to fellow beings.[48] In philosophical terms nirvana is the most important aspect of Buddhist theory, which can be compared with Socrates' justice and Hegel's spirit.[49]

Buddha did not appear to be a pure materialist, but followed a combination of materialism and spiritualism. In the process, he emerged a materio-spiritual dialectician. He was deliberately silent on the existence of god because of the difficulty in convincing the people of his non existence and also the irrelevance of such a discourse. In fact he wanted to take the people away from the very problem of proving or disproving the existence of god. Buddha's perception was that on some questions silence would have more appeal than the most violent arguments. And he was proved absolutely right, for through his silence he convinced thousands of people. Though he spoke of non-violence, his theory of it, unlike that of the Jains, was limited to curbing the self-indulgent violence of Brahminism (like beef-eating) which was coming in the way of agricultural development, and to curbing human extinction in wars. In order to get a clear idea of the Eight-Fold Path let us try to analyse the main principles involved in it.[50]

The Eight-Fold Path

Right Views

Although they have never been discussed in detail, let us analyse these eight principles as they form the core of Buddha's philosophy. Buddha said that without perceiving reality it would not be possible to transform it. As Kosambi puts it, 'This world is filled with sorrow generated by uncontrolled desire, greed, cupidity, and self-seeking on the part of mankind. The quenching of desire is the path to peace for all.'[51] It is important to hold proper views or, in other words, without a proper understanding of developments one cannot effectively intervene. Buddha's concept of Right Views has a moral perspective. He appeals to his disciples to purify their moral strength by holding correct views about life.

Right Aspirations

According to Buddha it is not enough to hold Right Views but one should also aim at transforming these Right Views into action. In

order to do so one should be clear about what one would like to achieve. His principle of Right Aspirations is intended to achieve this goal. In Kosambi's view the second principle enjoins upon one not to increase one's wealth and power at the expense of others, not to be lost in the enjoyment of the senses and in luxury.

Right Speech

Though speech is an expression of thoughts or views, Buddha thought that a lot of training had to go into organizing one's own speech. It is through Right Speech that one influences the other, and therefore he wished his disciples to develop it and in turn teach it to the people at large. By doing so society could be purified.[52] Lies, calumny, vituperation, useless chatter, and such misuse of the tongue spoils the organization of society, but right speech helps in building up friendship among people and in turn building a proper society.

Right Conduct

Human conduct is a part of one's training. The aspirant could acquire it either through personal discipline (that was his experience) or through preception by the sanghas. In order to facilitate the acquisition of right conduct, Buddha decided to establish the sangha, which thus became the centre of political training. Right conduct also includes abstention from killing or injuring others and so forth.[53]

Right Means of Livelihood

Through this principle Buddha wanted to implement his principle of renunciation and also the principle of limited non-violence. Contemporary society was ridden with robbery and aggrandizement, sanctioned by the default of moral condemnation. Buddha wanted to mould his sangha and also society by propagating the principle of the Right Means of Livelihood as a moral good. In a way this principle was to aim at providing dignity to labour, because during Buddha's time exploitation was gaining ground and labour was losing dignity.

Right Effort

This principle aims at promoting the determination to persistent effort in order to achieve goals. It also aims at infusing a missionary zeal both into the disciples of the sangha and also among the people.

Right Mindedness (Thought)

Perhaps in Buddha's view Right Views are formed because of right thinking—which he calls Right Mindedness. Buddha was the first person to maintain that right thinking develops in the right material conditions. Therefore it is necessary to work for the development of such conditions in order to achieve right thinking.[54]

Right Rapture

The concept of Right Rapture in Buddhist language is nothing but self-control. Buddha believed in controlling oneself in the face of so many worldly attractions. He believed that Right Rapture should include abstaining from sex, and throughout his life he persisted in self-consciousness and self-control. The concepts of mendicancy and of the sangha based on 'no family' and 'no property' are the extension of the Right Rapture principle. Kosambi said of the eighth step, 'It is to Buddhism what Gymnastics was to the Greek body'.[55]

A systematic study of Buddhist ideology indicates that these philosophical questions are intended to propose an alternative theoretical proposition to the state and administrative institutions that were being established by Hindu kings. Though the Hindu thinkers and Buddha used the concept of dhamma, the meaning conveyed by them was altogether different. The Buddhist concept of dharma is based on the Middle Path of Buddha. We shall examine this aspect in subsequent chapters in detail.

From the Deer Park speech to the end of his life, Buddha not only established several sanghas but also influenced the thinking of important contemporary people including rulers. Several Kshatriyas—both men and women—left their states and joined the sangha. Members of his own family, including Devadatta (his

cousin), Maha Prajapati (his stepmother) and Rahula (his son) joined the sangha. The sangha system also produced well-known teachers like Ananda, Upali and Maha Kassapa who took the responsibility for continuing Buddha's work. Subsequently a violent ruler like Ashoka was influenced by Buddhism and also eventually joined the sangha renouncing his mighty empire.

Buddha died in his eightieth year, around 480–485 BCE. After his death his followers continued to operate according to the principles established by him. It is interesting to note the exchange that took place when Buddha's disciple Ananda chanced to meet an old Brahmin friend, who enquired, 'Now that Buddha has passed away, is there anyone of equal stature to carry on in his place?' Ananda replied,

> Friend, how could there possibly be anyone of equal greatness? Buddha through his own efforts attained an understanding of the truth and set about putting it into practice. All that we, his disciples, can do is to follow the teachings that he handed down and the example that he set for us.

Commenting on this statement Daisaku Ikeda says that 'this amounts to saying rely on the Law, not on the person'.[56]

Buddha is the first great ancient thinker who set a code of conduct for civil society. As we have discussed earlier, society at that time was ravaged by wars and disaffection. We must understand the eight principles of Buddha in the context of the brahminical yajna culture. Buddha started addressing the people directly to avoid or to oppose brahminical ritualism and wasteful consumption of wealth. In the context of the increasing casteism, exploitation and consumerism in modern times a critical re-examination of Buddha's Eight-Fold Path to build up the 'culture of austerity' is necessary. The civil society of the modern world must address this question very seriously. The state is also encouraging competitiveness and the culture of consumerism. The most popular thinker of the modern world who subscribed to the principle of austerity was Mao Zedong. While the liberation war was going on Mao imposed many principles of discipline on the party cadre. After the revolution succeeded a similar code of discipline and particularly the discouragement of consumerism

the party cadre. After the revolution succeeded a similar code of discipline and particularly the discouragement of consumerism was attempted in a big way. Mao succeeded to a large extent in building up a social basis for austerity. In a system like ours the ancient roots of austerity lie in Buddhist philosophy and ideology.

Thus, the conditions in which Buddha grew gave him a perspective, an outlook and a philosophy. All these views of Buddha have to be understood in relation to his perspective on the state and society. We shall examine this perspective in subsequent chapters.

NOTES

1. Asva Ghosha's *Buddha Charita* is the earliest account of Buddha and his sangha written around 100 CE. See Asva Ghosha, *A Life of the Buddha*, tr. Samuel Beal, SBE (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), vol. 29.
2. T. W. Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg, apart from writing biographies of the Buddha, have translated most of the Buddhist *Suttas* into English and German.
3. Oldenberg, *Buddha*. 'Siddhartha' is another title acquired by Buddha in the process of his teaching, meaning 'One who has acquired everything in his lifetime'. Oldenberg was a professor at the University of Berlin and edited the *Vinaya Pitakas* and the *Dipavamsa* in Pali.
4. S. Natarajan, *Political and Cultural History of India* (Secunderabad: privately published, 1981), vol. 1, 5th ed., p. 36.
5. Kenneth J. Saunders, *Gautama Buddha: A Biography*, based on the canonical books of the *Theravadin* (New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1978), pp. 10, 13.
6. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 97.
7. The concept of *matsyanyaya* was used in a systematic way by Kautilya and subsequent Hindu lawgivers of ancient India. This concept denotes that the stronger rules over the weaker. The rule of the jungle prevails. It is an equivalent of the saying 'Might is Right'.
8. Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, p. 12.
9. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, pp. 467–474.
10. Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, p. 12.

11. D. D. Kosambi in *Historical Outline* argues that 'the existence of new classes in the Gangetic basin of the sixth century is undeniable. The free peasants and farmers were one. The Neo-Vedic pastoral class of Vaisyas within the tribe was replaced by agriculturists for whom the tribe had ceased to exist.' Though the Vaisya class did not yet exist as a separate class in the sixth century BCE, by the time Gautama was born the process of its formation had begun. Earlier this class was part of the Sudra class. See *Historical Outline*, p. 100.
12. Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, p. 15. Only once is it mentioned that the Buddha had some formal education from his gurus and learned something of the earlier Vedas.
13. Narayana Chandra Bandyopadhyaya, *Hindu Polity and Political Theories* (Jaipur: Printwell Publishers, 1989), p. 258.
14. Sharma, *Material Culture*, chapter 7. The iron ploughshare was employed to overcome this crisis only in 600 BCE.
15. Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 101.
16. See Kancha Ilaiah, 'Buddhism as Political Philosophy' in *Social Science Probings*, 3(4), Dec. 1986 for the author's analysis of this aspect.
17. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, pp. 61–67.
18. Bandopadhyaya, *Hindu Polity and Political Theories*, p. 258.
19. See R. S. Sharma's *Ancient India*, pp. 57–59.
20. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 23.
21. According to Saunders accounts of this sort are available in Buddhist books which describe the methods of torture inflicted for sins such as theft, highway robbery and adultery. See Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, pp. 15–19.
22. Oldenberg says 'We are told that the Buddha was married but whether to one or several wives is not known. Her name appears to have been unknown to the ancient church. Copious inventions of later times first filled up these gaps in various ways.' Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 101.
23. See Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 145 for a detailed description of the schemes of Kautilya to divide and subdue the tribals.
24. Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 71.
25. Many Hindu ascetics who renounced worldly life resorted to solitary prayers to appeal to the Gods. Hindu asceticism was merely a self-attainment process without bothering about the society or world.
26. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 104.

28. Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, p. 24. Wandering far and wide gave him scope to observe nature, people, different cultures and civilizations. His appreciation of nature's beauty and of tribalism were results of this wandering. His political understanding, like that of Rousseau, emerges out of this wandering and observing things. Also see Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, pp. 29–30.
29. *Digha Nikaya*, tr. Rhys Davids, provides evidence that Gautama himself said 'that indeed it is not a suitable form that I should live beset'. These eighty-four thousand wanderers went one way and Buddha went another way. *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. 22.
30. Five of his associates left him when he abandoned meditation and starvation. See Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, pp. 33, 24.
31. Gandhi lived in an era when the dialectical materialist approach to life had become a basis for understanding society. Marx and Engels had already propagated their philosophy, and the Russian revolution had succeeded. In this context Gandhi becomes a retrogressive thinker.
32. It is important to note that the distinction drawn between the Gautama stage and Buddhahood by religious schools, in a way, is incorrect because throughout Gautama's life there is a link. His disciples and people around him gave him the title 'Buddha', but Gautama acquired this maturity of mind in the process of his learning and teaching.
33. Quoted in Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, p. 25.
34. *Dhammapada*, pp. 153-154, Sir Edwin Arnold's translation, quoted in Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, p. 25.
35. The contemporary world of Gautama was trying extensively to grapple with the problem of rebirth. Even in other parts of the world this was the crux of the philosophical problem. This in itself is a process of philosophical development, as it took the human race a long time to realize fully that they are born, grown and finally die. After human beings evolved from that stage, the concepts of rebirth, soul and body began to be grappled with. The metaphysical school went on saying that the soul is separate from the body. Depending on the approach of individuals to their God either the soul permanently merges with God or if the individual does not please God, the soul would leave the body and enter into some other body. The brahminical rishis' approach was that if individuals did not follow

the Vedic dharma (to wit, if brahminical rituals were not practised), and if varna harma was not followed the soul of an individual would enter into a worse body where the sufferings of the soul would increase.

36. Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, p. 26. 'Nibbana' here means 'satisfied with his own moral experience'.
37. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 125-126. Also see Saunders, *Gautama Buddha*, p. 33.
38. Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 106.
39. Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 121.
40. Chatterjee and Datta, *Introduction to Indian Philosophy*.
41. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 131.
42. Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 105.
43. See 'The Soul Theory of the Jains' in Chatterjee and Datta, *Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 94. Also see Sergei Tokarev, *History of Religion* (Moscow: Progress Publishers), p. 174, and Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 131.
44. See Tokarev, *History of Religion*, p. 168. In Ambedkar, 'Philosophy of Hinduism', *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 3, we find a detailed examination of Manu's divine rights theory, pp. 3–92.
45. Here the word 'nirvana' is used in the sense of highest knowledge.
46. All the major ancient religious thinkers believed that every human being takes rebirth based on the deeds of that person in this life.
47. The term 'nirvana' is used here both in the sense of highest knowledge and also death. See Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 204, 221, 267, 329.
48. Ibid., p. 290.
49. Nersesyants, *Political Thought of Ancient Greece* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), p. 97.
50. The English translation of the original eight principles Buddha talked about, is available in *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 11. The principles are available in *Dhamma Chakka Ppabattana Sutta*. Rhys Davids translates them as follows: (1) Right views, (2) Right Aspirations, (3) Right speech, (4) Right Conduct, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness and (8) Right contemplation. See SBE, vol. 11, p. 147. The Pali Eight-Fold Path reads as follows: (1) *Samma-Ditthi*, (2) *Samma-Sankappa*, (3) *Samma-Vaca*, (4) *Samma-Kammanta*, (5) *Samma-Ajiva*, (6) *Samma-Vayama*, (7) *Samma-Sati* and (8) *Samma-Samadhi*. See *Digha Nikaya*, pp. 21–22.
51. Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 106. Also see *Digha Nikaya*, p. 22.

52. Right Speech involves abstinence from speaking falsehood, from using harsh or trivial language. Conscious telling of lies should be avoided. See *Digha Nikaya*, p. 22.
53. Bennet includes the five major abstentions (not to kill any living thing, not to lay hands on another's property, not to touch another's wife, not to speak what is untrue, not to drink intoxicating drinks) that Buddha made part of the law. See *Digha Nikaya*, p. 23.
54. Right Mindfulness also includes the following moral prescribed by Buddha. One will have to find good things in order to cultivate them and evil things in order to avoid them. Distinction between good and bad is an essential component of Buddhism. See *Digha Nikaya*, p.23.
55. See Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 106, also *Digha Nikaya*, pp. 23–24.
56. Daisaku Ikeda, *Buddhism: the First Millennium* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978), p. 16.

The State and Its Origins

For a long time the institution of the state remained a mystery to ancient peoples. But as society grew more and more complex, the human understanding of it also acquired sophistication. This was first reflected in the formulation by some thinkers of certain philosophical concepts, out of which emerged the idea of god. God was said to be the creator of the universe, and to Him was attributed the power of creating the state and society. Others questioned this theory of the divine origin of the state and the debate thus generated has engaged philosophers and political thinkers throughout human history.

As the state became more visible, its role in controlling the life of individuals increased. This precipitated a further debate about its origin and growth. It appears that the debate about the state in ancient India was as intense as it was in the West. In India the usage of the term *'rajya'* was equivalent to that of 'state'. As has been discussed in an earlier chapter, the Ganga Valley, at the time of Buddha, was divided into six mahajanapada states (rajyas). The head of the state was called *rajan*. Both Hindu theoreticians and Buddhists used the term 'rajan' in the same sense, as equivalent to 'king'. We are not sure whether *'sarvabhouma'*, more or less equivalent to 'sovereign', was used in the Buddhist and pre-Buddhist periods, but we are sure that rajan *or rajanya* were used. A careful examination of Western political philosophy also indicates that the concept of sovereignty came into usage only during the medieval period; the first thinker to conceptualize sovereignty in the West was Jean Bodin. There seem to be historical and philosophical parallels in the evolution of certain concepts in the West and the East. The most important process that needs to be probed

in this context is the formation of the state itself. The first chapter of Romila Thapar's scholarly work *From Lineage to State* examines four different situations: the Rig Veda and the later Vedic societies of the Indo-Gangetic watershed and the western Ganga Valley as well as the *gana-sangha* system and the emergence of monarchies in the middle Ganga Valley.[1] Having examined these four systems she concludes, 'in both regions there is evidence of a change in direction towards state formation'. This change came about because at this stage the state had a definite function: to establish and maintain sovereignty (*sarvabhoumathvam*) both externally and internally. The former it was to accomplish by protecting the territory from aggression, and the latter by the promulgation of laws. By the sixth century BCE it seems that the state had become strong enough to regulate social life. According to Romila Thapar the historical trend was one of gradual formalization of customary rules, often resulting in the codification of laws. Taxes began to be regulated and collected, and became a permanent part of state income. The earliest sources in India give us enough evidence of the existence of this kind of role for the state.

There is one basic difference between the early state of ancient India and the ancient West. As we know, some of the early Greek states were city-states which were governed by senates, by and large consisting of 5-6 clan elders and an elected king. Though the Indus valley society indicates the existence of city-state structure even in the Indian subcontinent, not much is known about the nature of political institutions during that period. As we have described elsewhere, the Indian state had passed through the tribal democratic or tribal republican stage and entered the gana sangha stage headed by *ganapatis* who were muscle-powered tribal chieftains, then progressed to the janapada stage, finally resulting in the emergence of the imperial kingdom of Magadha. So unlike the evolution of the Western state system, the emergence of the Indian state seems to have been gradual. This gradual process of evolution of a highly structured state gave enormous scope for debate on the origin and nature of statehood in India, much earlier than in Greece.[2]

Buddha's Method

After a careful study of the political thinkers of the ninth and sixth centuries BCE in Greece, Nersesyants sums up,

> At the early stage of history the world outlook of ancient peoples, the Greeks inclusive, was essentially mythological. Their political and legal views had not yet separated from this single syncretic outlook and the order of things on the earth was regarded as an integral part of the cosmic order, divine in its origin and content. The earthly life of men, their social, political and legal institutions, relations with the Gods and with one another were treated within the framework and on the basis of the mythological version of the cosmos and the Gods.[3]

Contrary to Nersesyants' generalizations, Gautama Buddha abandoned the mythological framework and posed the question altogether differently. In his early preachings Buddha said, 'When the conditions [of existence] reveal themselves then must every doubt give way'.[4] When Buddha said that 'the origin of all becoming is revealed' to him, he meant that the origin of the universe, the origin of the earth and, as Nersesyants put it, the origin of the earthly life of men, their social, political and legal institutions was becoming clear to him. Buddha was the only thinker of the period who never talked about gods. He was dealing with everything in a dialectical way. Buddha said, 'Then brothers, from attention to the cause arose the conviction through reasons'; and he further added, 'Where name and form is, there is cognition; name and form conditions cognition'.[5] He realized that name is only an expression of form and that cognition is conditioned by the environment. Once questions began to arise in his mind the answers to such questions were naturally found in a dialectical discourse; he never attempted to seek answers in a metaphysical domain. He was, thus, presenting a dialectical alternative to brahminical divinity and to the concept of soul.[6] He said, 'Where becoming is absent, birth is absent, when becoming ceases birth ceases . . . where contact is absent, feeling is absent, when contact ceases, feeling ceases.' From such a dialectical causation he arrived at

rational conclusions; he saw the relationship between being and birth and contact and feeling. Buddha was very much aware of the limitations of brahminical theories.

While answering the questions of Kassapa, a Brahmin ascetic, Buddha said, 'There are, Kassapa, certain-Brahmins, clever, skilful in disputation, hair splitters . . . who go about in the pursuit of wisdom but which is, I think, speculative theory . . .'[7] Methodologically speaking, the conflict between Brahminism and Buddhism was the conflict between speculation and dialectical reasoning. Buddha was finding solutions within the framework of human existence. He realized that life should be made worth living in this world. Rhys Davids summed up the Buddhist alternative very aptly:

> The central position of the Buddhist alternative to those previous views of life was this: Gautama ignored the whole of the soul theory, and held all discussion with regard to soul with which the *Vedanta* and the other philosophers were chiefly concerned as not only childish and useless, but actually inimical to the ideal of a perfect life here and now in this present world, in *arhatship*.[8]

Rhys Davids further said, 'Buddhism declares that everything has a cause; and that it is not only sufficient, it is the only true method to argue from one cause back to the next, and so on without any hope or even desire to explain the ultimate cause of all things.' He quotes a stanza from a Buddhist shrine which sums up the Buddhist view very well:

> Of all the things that proceed from a cause,
> The Buddha the cause hath told;
> And he tells too how each shall come to its end,
> Such alone is the word of the sage.

Narrating the Buddhist discourse of evolution Rockhill says, After having remained with Mutchilinda as long as it pleased him, the Blessed One went to Bodhimanda and there he remained seven days seated on grass studying the twelve branches of the theory of causes and effects and when that theory had become

fixed in his mind he spoke the *Udana* which is recorded in the last verses of the *Udanavagga'*.[9] It appears that Buddha was the first person to study the theories of cause and effect in a systematic way. Discovering the fact that everything has a cause and the cause has its own effect, Buddha had ranged far from his contemporary thinkers of the West—leave alone the brahminical thinkers of India.[10] In the field of political philosophy the Buddhist discovery of cause and effect theory is as remarkable as the discovery of number doctrine by Pythagoras in Greece.[11]

Buddha's understanding of the state, its origin and growth has to be examined in the light of the major philosophical differences between these two ancient Indian schools. The brahminical school relied for centuries on the concepts of soul and karma, whereas the Buddhist school attempted to give up this kind of metaphysical explanation and discovered, in the process, a very rational method of resolving every question from the point of view of cause and effect.[12] Buddha also attempted to understand the interlinks of each development. All this was to make life worth living now and here. In the sixth century BCE when human beings were still groping in the darkness of savagery, to have reached the heights that Buddha reached is a remarkable achievement.[13]

The dialectical outlook of Buddha influenced his thought. He questioned every structure and institution from the point of view of its utility to human beings, leading him to examine the question of the origin of the state from a rational perspective.[14]

The Brahminical and the Buddhist Views of the State

The Hindu view and the Buddhist view of the state come from two different streams of thought. To give a comparative picture let us take the view held by Kautilya on the emerging state and people. Kautilya was a strong protagonist of the monarchical state. Any threat to question or devalue the monarchical state was treated by him with contempt. In fact, he worked out ways to disintegrate and destroy the tribal peoples who were still maintaining tribal democratic institutions in their societies. In this Kautilya was reflecting the state policy of the emerging imperial rulers of the time.[15] This is what Kautilya had to say on breaking up the group-bond of these tribal democratic structures.

> Spies entering the sanghas [the tribals called their political systems sanghas and Buddha seems to have borrowed the term from them] and discovering jealousy, hatred and other prospects of internal conflicts, should sow the seeds of a well planned dissension among them. Under disguise of teachers (*acharyas*) they should cause childish embroils among the chiefs. Sharp spies may provoke the chiefs of sanghas by praising their inferiors in taverns and brothels. Under disguise of astrologers and others the spies should give publicity within the sanghas to the royal marks of the prince; as such the honest leaders of the sanghas should be led to subservience to the prince, born of this or the other king. To those who are thus prevailed upon, the king should send gifts of cattle, men and other materials. They should be thus won over. On occasions of any affray, spies, pretending to be wine dealers, should, under the plea of the birth of a son, of marriage, or of the death of some one, distribute hundreds of vessels of liquor adulterated with *madhava* juice [an aphrodisiac]. Greed in the chiefs is to be provoked with golden rings and gold [left] at the portals of *chaityas* and shrines.

Keepers of harlots or dancers, players or actors, after gaining access to the sanghas, excite the lust of the chiefs by exhibiting women with bewitching youth and beauty. By removing the women to other persons or by staging their kidnapping by others, they should bring about violent quarrels among those that have fallen in love with them. In the ensuing affray, sharp spies would do their work and declare: thus is the lecher destroyed.

After betraying her lover [a chief], a woman should approach another chief and say, 'That other chief is bothering me when my mind is set on you; while he remains alive I cannot stay here', thus the one will be provoked to kill the other.

A woman violently carried off at night will cause the death of her violator near a park or pleasure garden with sharp weapons or poison given by herself. And then she will declare, 'My darling is killed by the other man.'

In the disguise of an ascetic, a spy at night time may offer to one sexually aroused ointments claimed to have the power of

captivating women but really mixed with poison; and then he will disappear. Other spies would be there to declare the incident to be a rival's act.

Widows with secret instructions, or women disguised as female mendicants, will, while pretending to quarrel over a claim for a deposit kept with the king will show themselves off to the chief and will thus make the sangha chiefs mad with lust.

Harlots or dancing women or songstresses may make an evening appointment to meet a lover at some secret house and when they turn up sharp spies will kill them or carry them away in chains.

A spy will describe to a sangha chief, who is fond of females, saying, 'A poor man is removed from that village but his wife deserves to be a queen (in beauty). You must have her.' After she is carried away a fortnight later, another spy in the guise of an ascetic will sharply denounce the chief in the tribal assembly saying, 'This man has forcefully detained my wife or daughter-in-law or sister or daughter.' When the sangha punishes the chief, the king will arrest him and have him tortured. Sharp spies in the garb of mendicants should be moving about at night. Spies, in various disguises, should accuse the chiefs saying, 'The man has slain a Brahmin and has committed adultery with a Brahmin woman.'

Disguised as an astrologer, a spy will predict for a marriageable girl, saying. 'This man's daughter is going to be a queen and mother of a king, get her at any cost, even by force.' If one chief fails to get her, the spies should instigate his rivals to do it. And when a rival succeeds a feud is inevitable.

A mendicant woman will tell a chief who is fond of his wife, 'This other chief, proud of his youth, asked me to entice your wife; being afraid of him, I had to carry his letter and the ornaments for your wife. Your wife is innocent. But secret steps are to be taken against that chief and I shall anxiously wait for your success.'[16]

In these quotations what is important for our purpose, apart from the cruel methods adopted by Kautilya to systematically destroy enemies, is his political goal. Monarchy had to be strengthened and the tribal democratic sanghas were to be pushed to disintegration and destroyed. In the process, of course, Kautilya became the father of a ruthlessly brutal political culture.[17]

Kautilya's attempt to disintegrate the sangha system goes against K. P. Jayaswal's assertion that the sangha system was accepted as a republican form of the state by both Hindu and Buddhist thinkers in the same way. In fact, Jayaswal, who is considered to be one of the most prominent scholars and as one who did original work on ancient Indian polity, was mistaken on two theoretical points. First, in order to disprove the colonial argument that there was no democratic tradition in India he projected all that was ancient as part of the Hindu tradition. He used all the Buddhist literature, particularly Buddha's theoretical models, as Hindu models. For example, the sangha was entirely a Buddhist innovation but it was treated as a Hindu institution. According to Jayaswal, the history of the religious brotherhood of Buddha emerged from the constitutional womb of the Indian Hindu republics.[18] Jayaswal says, 'It was a case of borrowing from Hinduism; at the same time there was an original idea behind it which only a great mind could perceive. The originality of Buddha consisted in transforming the constitution of a political corporation into religion, and conjuring up an organization to perpetuate the being of that religion.'

Second, Jayaswal's argument was that Buddhism had used its contemporary political institutions for religious ends. But the very data that Jayaswal uses throughout his book *Hindu Polity* goes to prove that Buddha was more a political thinker than a religious preceptor. Further, there is no evidence to prove that when Buddha was alive he or his disciples called the sangha a religious institution.[19] On the contrary, because of the ritualistic sacrifices practised by the Brahmins, Hindu thinkers tried to convert everything into religion. Almost all Hindu historians treated Kautilya as a 'secular' thinker. Jayaswal treated Panini, a Brahmin grammarian who was perhaps a contemporary of Buddha, as a 'secular' thinker, but never did he treat Buddha in this way.[20]

However, Kautilya's approach of destabilizing the tribal sanghas only synthesized the general Hindu line of argument. Buddha had a different approach to tribal republican sanghas and their survival. He believed that the tribal system was an embryonic structure of the state, and seemed to know what constitutes a negative state. He examined things from their day-to-day practice, in total contrast to the methods of Hindu thinkers like

Kautilya. As against the Kautilyan destructive attitude towards tribal republics Buddha took a positive view of them.[21]

There was a tribal confederacy called the Vajjians during Buddha's time, which King Ajatasatru wanted to attack and annex to his imperial kingdom. But before doing so he wanted Buddha's opinion and sent a Brahmin minister to him at Rajagaha. When the Brahmin minister arrived and explained the king's desire to destroy the Vajjian Republic Buddha categorically rejected the idea. To quote Buddha from *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*:

> And the Blessed One said to [his disciple Ananda], 'Have you heard, Ananda, that the Vajjians foregather often and frequent the public meeting of their clan?'
> 'Lord, so I have heard,' replied he. 'So long, Ananda,' rejoined the Blessed One, as the Vajjians foregather thus often and frequent the public meetings of their clan; so long may they be expected not to decline; but to prosper.
> 'So long Ananda, as the Vajjians meet together in concord and rise in concord and carry out their undertaking in concord—so long as they enact nothing not already established, abrogate nothing that has been already enacted and act in accordance with the ancient institutions of Vajjians, as established in former days—so long as they honour and esteem and revere and support the Vajjian elders and hold it a point of duty to hearken to their words—so long as no women or girls belonging to their clans are detained among them by force or abduction—so long as they honour and esteem and revere and support the Vajjian shrines [Chetiyani] in town or country, and allow not the proper offerings and rites, as formerly given and performed, to fall into desuetude—so long as the rightful protection, defence, and support shall be fully provided for the arahats[22] among them, so that arahats from a distance may enter the realm, and the Arahats therein may live at ease—so long as may the Vajjians be expected not to decline, but to prosper.'[23]

Buddha's justifications for allowing the Vajjian state to exercise its autonomy show that for him its prime value was the democracy of its political life. Though Kautilya lived later than Ajatasa-

tru, he only legitimized what the Hindu rulers did and wanted to do before and during Buddha's lifetime. One can see a remarkable similarity in what Kautilya said about the tribal sanghas and what Ajatasatru said about the Vajjian tribes. The *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* also gives Ajatasatru's views. Even though Buddha opposed Ajatasatru's plans to annex the Vajjian tribal republics, Ajatasatru ignored his admonitions and went ahead regardless of the value of the Vajjian way of life. This he held as of small importance beside the interests of his imperial state. In his own words, 'I will strike at these Vajjians, mighty and powerful though they be, I will root out these Vajjians. I will destroy these Vajjians. I will bring these Vajjians to utter ruin.'[24]

This is one reason why Ajatasatru has become the hero of right wing schools of Indian thought and has been projected as the model king of Hindu nationalism. For those who believe in the principle of 'Akhand Bharat,' Ajatasatru is a powerful symbol as he destroyed all the tribal republics that Buddha appreciated and wished to preserve. Ajatasatru was not talking merely of conquering but of annihilating them. Like Kautilya he reserved all his contempt for these tribal republican states.[25] Quite contrary to this Hindu view, Buddha took a very democratic and rational position towards these states. First, he wanted to know whether they retained and respected the democratic practice of regular meeting and open debates and whether old people and women were safe. He wanted to know whether the Vajjians respected ascetics and foreigners and gave them shelter. When he heard from Ananda that the Vajjians did practice all these good customs, Buddha resolved that they should not only be saved from destruction but helped to prosper. Jayaswal says, 'As soon as the Brahman (messenger) left, the Buddha called a meeting of the Bhikkhu Sangha in the Hall and taught them the several conditions of the welfare of a community.'

According to Buddha these seven conditions were the general principles that could govern any democratic state in future. They are:

(*i*) So long as the bhikkhus meet together in full and frequent assemblies;

(*ii*) So long as they meet together in concord and rise in concord and they carry out in accord the duties of the Sangha;
(*iii*) So long as the Bhikkhus shall establish nothing that has already been proscribed and abrogate nothing that has already been established and act in accordance with the rules of the Sangha now laid down;
(*iv*) So long as the brethren honour and esteem and revere and support the elders, the fathers and the leaders of the Sangha and hold it a point of duty to hearken to their words;
(*v*) So long as the brethren fall not under the influence of that craving;
(*vi*) So long as the brethren delight in a life of solitude;
(*vii*) So long as the brethren so train their minds;
So long the Bhikkhus may be expected not to decline but to prosper.

Jayaswal goes on to argue that this history of the birth of the religious brotherhood of Buddha from the constitutional womb of the Indian Republic is of interest not only to this country but also to the world at large. He further concludes that 'these Indian Republics were Hindu Republics.'[26] When Jayaswal puts forth this argument in opposition to Eurocentric colonial arguments, it appears that there are nationalistic aspirations involved, but it is nevertheless undoubtedly a distortion of history. It is incorrect to say that Buddhism emerged only as a religious order, as Buddha's arguments were essentially political.[27] There was furthermore no evidence to assume that the tribal republican practices that Buddha emulated were part of the continuum advocated by the Hindu priest-king nexus. The tribal republics, where there was democratic practice, had nothing to do with the Hindu religion; in fact they were challenging the Hindu imperialization of the state. The Buddhist movement established its 'Middle Path' theory in order to protect the tribal democratic tradition, and the Buddhist sangha was a fine example of this practice. Though Jayaswal quotes extensively from Buddhist sources he tailors them to suit his Hindu theory.[28]

Buddha had a definite view of the state and its role. He was a preserver of the republican states and democratic institutions as against the designs of Hindu thinkers who were for establishing an imperial state or sanghatitha rajya. R. C. Majumdar aptly sums up Buddha's sympathetic outlook towards democratic structures. He says that 'the new school thus appears to possess genuine sympathy for political corporations. The contrast with the school of Kautilya is indeed a striking one. Instead of suggesting dubious devices by which ruin may be brought upon the *ganas* it [Buddhism] offers healthy recommendations for avoiding those pitfalls and dangers to which they are peculiarly liable.'[29] Not that there were no exceptions to this kind of Hindu thinking among those who believed in Hinduism. One can see the difference between Jayaswal and Majumdar. Jayaswal's project was to assimilate the Buddhist sangha practices into Hinduism, just as it was part of the Hindu design to assimilate Buddhism into Hinduism. Such a distortion of history only helped communal forces to use history to their own advantage. Under the guise of fighting Eurocentrism and colonialism, what actually was accomplished was a communalization of history.

Buddha's Theory of the Origin of the State

Any debate on the origin of the state must be preceded by a discussion on human nature, because the assumption of the necessary nature of the state depends on one's understanding of human nature. All the Western social contractualists based their arguments on their own understanding of human nature. Their conclusions on the origin of the state depended on this vital question. Hobbes believed that human beings by nature were selfish and wicked, and, therefore, he advocated a leviathanic state. The very need for his social contract theory emerges from human wickedness which itself was self-devouring. In the state of nature there was 'war of all against all'.[30] That is the reason why his contract was nothing but the surrender of all rights of citizens to one institution called Leviathan. Locke, on the contrary, starts with the view that human beings by nature are not selfish but helpful to each other. The need for the creation of a state arose in order to improve and develop the conditions of living. Thus,

Locke argues that human beings signed two contracts; one was societal and the other governmental and in both these contracts citizens do not surrender all their rights. The state for him was a flexible institution which changes its structure as the need for such a change occurs. Thus the Lockian social contract is a democratic contract that creates a democratic state. In the Puritan revolution of 1649, John Locke theorized that government must be based on the consent of the governed.[31] Locke's concept of natural rights—the right to life, right to liberty and right to property—became the foundation of limited government. That is why Karl Marx praises him as the harbinger of democratic revolutions.

The last but most important contractualist was Rousseau who had sown the seeds of the French Revolution. He believed that by nature human beings were noble and in the state of nature they were 'Noble Savages'. Rousseau discovered that primitive conditions keep human consciousness also primitive. From the womb of primitiveness itself emerges the relatively rational idea that communities based on right values, rather than industrialization, prosper. According to Rousseau, 'Primitive man is dominated by the fundamental urge: the first is the basic impulse of self-preservation, which is easily satisfied in a physical environment favourable to survival; at the same time he is prevented from being wantonly aggressive towards others by the impulse of 'natural pity', which is spontaneous aversion to the sight of suffering'.[32] Based on this he not only gives a call for going back to the state of nature but also pleads for creation of a political system based on 'General Will', which is neither the will of the minority nor the will of the majority. Rousseau goes on to justify revolutionary change in order to preserve right values and the rights of people. In the light of these widely known views of modern Western contractualists let us examine the Hindu and the Buddhist views of human nature and the origin of the state.

The Hindu Divine Rights Theory

The ancient Hindu thinkers' support to strong imperial states and their apathy towards tribal democratic republics is rooted in their absolutist understanding of human nature. The two great representatives of Vedic (Hindu) thought, Kautilya and Manu, be-

lieved that by nature human beings are selfish and that ordinary humans were so depraved that they could be kept on the proper path only by the fear of punishment.[33] According to Saletore Manu himself plainly stated that 'the whole race of men is kept in order by punishment, for a faultless man is hard to find: through fear of punishment, indeed, this universe is called to enjoy its blessings'.[34] Their concept of matsyanyaya is a result of this understanding of human nature, and from this they evolved the concept of danda as an essential part of the state apparatus. Hindu philosophers also believed that there existed a state of nature which was anarchic. The Hindu theory assumed that even within the state of nature there were two kinds of people, the *suras* (devatas) and asuras (rakshasas). According to the Hindu thinkers because of prevailing *arachaka* (anarchy) the rakshasas revolted against the devatas.[35] The devatas in turn approached Brahma to create a powerful person to save the devatas and maintain order. Thus Brahma created a ruler who ruled with the help of danda. Though this is a 'divine right' explanation, it also hints that God created the state to protect the ruling class—the devatas, and also justifies any amount of force used against the masses or rakshasas by the rulers or devatas.

Though the '*Shanti Parva*' of the *Mahabharata* mentions both the divine origin of the state as well as social contract, the divine origin theory is stressed more. According to R. S. Sharma, in Chapter 59 of the '*Shanti Parva*' there is a detailed description of how kingship was created. It is stated that Vishnu created a son born out of his mind to undertake the responsibility of administration, but he and several of his descendants renounced the world, which ultimately led to the tyrannical rule of Vena. The sages (rishis) put an end to the life of this ruler, and created from his right thigh Prithu, who was the eighth generation from Vishnu. In a contract, the sages clearly laid down the conditions on which Prithu Vainya would hold the throne: that he would rule according to the principle of *dandaniti*, that he would consider the Brahmins above punishment, and that he would save the world from the intermixture of castes. At this Prithu promised the deities headed by the rishis, that he would always worship the highly blessed Brahmins, the bulls among men.[36] According to this explanation the state is a creation of Vishnu who is the supreme

God, whose reincarnations are the *dasavataras*.[37] The brahminical perception of the state comes out very clearly in that Prithu exempted the Brahmins from punishment, regardless of the crimes they committed. The intermixing of different castes had to be stopped because it could bring about the downfall of brahminical supremacy. Though there is a mention of the contract at the second stage, it records only a covenant between the Brahmins (rishis) on the one hand and God and Prithu on the other; the Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras do not figure anywhere. It is important to note R. S. Sharma's comment on this: 'It is significant that the contract does not take place with the people but with the Brahmanas, who claim special privileges and protection from the king.'[38] What is more important is that there is a clear instruction to the king that he should rule according to the principles of dandaniti.

The principles of dandaniti clearly indicate that the state should be a police state and its purpose is to punish only non-Brahmins. There is no reference to dharma (justice) even as the Brahmins themselves conceived of it.[39] Jayaswal tried to argue that the Divine Rights theory does not occupy much space in Hindu political theory. But he does not give a reasonable explanation for statements he made himself about the creation of the state or king by the Gods as described in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Manu's *Dharma Shastra*, '*Shanti Parva*' and so on. Nor does he explain how Hindu thinkers justified the special status of Brahmins. On the contrary he makes a general statement that 'the Hindu theory of kingship was not permitted to degenerate into divine imposture and profane autocracy. Jugglery in the divine will of the creator was not possible for the Hindu king as the race never allowed the craft of the priest to be united in the office of the ruler.'[40] If this is so, how does Jayaswal justify the perpetuation of the caste system and exemption of Brahmins from any punishment? While it may be true that the Brahmins (priests) may never have been kings (rulers), brahminical power over the rulers remained unquestionable. Brahmins as interpreters of Hindu religion were much more powerful than the priests or popes in the Western context. Several European monarchs revolted against papal authority, ultimately overthrowing the supremacy of the church and bringing about a split between church and state. The brahminical priests in India

never allowed such a clear separation of the state from the authority vested in the temples. Through control and co-optation they sought to maintain their hegemony for centuries.

In fact, the Divine Right theory of Hindu thinkers goes very well historically with their practice. Not only Jayaswal, but Saletore and Altekar also continued this line of argument and this is where their communal interests became intertwined with their so-called secular philosophy. But it was R. S. Sharma who stood against communal interpretation to say, 'There is nothing to prove the contention of Jayaswal that to the royal oath the people pronounced "Amen" (*evamastu*). The pledge is clearly administered by the deities and the great sages (*paramarsayah*), who speak "Amen" when it has been taken by the king. By no stretch of [the] imagination can they be considered as representing the whole people.'[41] So, to say the least, Hindu political theoreticians, whether they lived before, during or after Buddha, had no faith in the positive aspect of human nature. This is why according to them the state of nature was chaotic and brutal, and in this respect their arguments resemble Hobbes's. On the question of a theory of the origin of the state, they were Divine Rightists. In terms of sovereignty they were absolutists and believed in police punishment (danda) like the absolute monarchs or despots of Europe.

Buddha's Social Contract Theory

Contrary to the Hindu theories, Buddha starts with the theory of cause and effect. He seemed to think that in the state of nature all was well with all. Each human being was helpful to the other, and only when the scarcity of food and resources grew did they start competing with each other. This paradigm of the beginning of controlled society at the price of giving up a primitive but free existence in what may be called the 'state of nature', occurs in the third volume of the *Dulva*[42] and also in *Digha Nikaya*. According to the *Dulva*, at the request of Buddha Moggallana narrates the story of 'world regeneration and of the ancient peoples who inhabited [it].' In the fifth volume the story is told to the bhikkhus by Buddha himself. According to this story in the olden days:

'If these beings wanted rice to eat in the evening or in the morning, they would go and get what was requisite; but it happened that one being who was of an indolent disposition took at one time enough rice for evening and morning. Now another being said to him, "Come, let us go for rice." Then he answered him, "Look after your own rice; I have taken enough at one time to last me morning and evening." Then the other thought "Good, capital! I will take enough rice for two, three, seven days" and he did accordingly. Then it happened that someone said to this person, "Come, let us go for rice," but he answered him, "look after your own rice, I have taken enough at one time for two, three, seven days." "Good!" thought the other, "I will take enough rice for a fortnight, for a month," and he did accordingly.'

This story gives an excellent exposition of Buddha's understanding of the situation that had driven human beings to enter into a contract that gives rise to authority. Though rice is used symbolically the story gives us very important clues about the Buddhist logic. At one stage everyone used to acquire as much rice' as he/she needed for a day. There was no need to preserve food or resources. Perhaps along with the increasing number of people and decreasing availability of food, the people began to think in terms of storing for the future. According to Buddha, this kind of preserving starts with storing food for tomorrow, for two days, for seven days, for one month and so on. But this practice increases scarcity because those who do not get anything remain deprived as long as others are better at gathering and storing food, and the acquisition of the latter group is no longer limited by the capacity of the human stomach. This situation has two aspects; for those who stored resources, the right to property was taking shape in an embryonic form. For others, still following the ethos of gathering, this amounted to denial of the right to exist.

In the same story, the Buddhist view of human nature also comes out clearly. When one tells the other, 'Let us go for rice,' and is answered, 'I have acquired rice sufficient for so many days,' the first one thinks of acquiring his own rice but not of attacking the second and taking away the rice he has collected. This narrative choice indicates that the storyteller, namely Buddha himself,

thought of human beings as essentially non-violent and good. And when there was plenty of food each one was helpful to the other. Now let us see how Buddha explains the origin of the state.

> 'And because these beings took to laying up provisions of this spontaneously growing rice, it became coarse [scarce] . . . Then these beings assembled together, in sorrow, grief, and lamentation and said, "Sirs, formerly we had ethereal bodies free from every impurity, with faculties unimpaired . . . Let us now draw lines of demarcation and establish between each one's property." So they drew lines of demarcation and set up bounds. "This is thine—this is mine"[they said]. Now, this is the first appearance in the world of a system of boundary lines.'[43]

According to Buddha, human beings first entered into a contract in order to create property as an institution, and this is the first step towards creation of the state or sovereign. The people lamented because the state of nature to which they were putting an end was worth preserving, yet changed conditions forced them to opt for this institution. This statement that 'formerly we had ethereal bodies free from every impurity with faculties unimpaired' is significant, referring to the period of plenty where human beings were absolutely unselfish. The first contract of Buddha reminds us of the first contract of Locke. Men in the state of nature, according to Locke, voluntarily compacted and agreed 'to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceful living, one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties and a greater security against any that are not of it.'[44] Though Locke calls this contract a 'societal contract' it was signed to create and preserve property as an institution. Let us turn to Buddha again:

> 'After this it happened that one person took another's rice without his consent, as if it was his own, and the other persons saw him. They said to him, "Why do you take the rice of another without his consent, as if it was your own? You must not do this again." But he went a second and a third time, and took the rice of another without his consent.

When the other persons saw this they said to him, "Why do you, thus, take the rice of another without his consent?" So they laid hold of him and led him into their midst.'
'"Sirs," they said, "this person has been guilty of taking the rice of another without his consent . . . . " Then they said unto him, "Why have you taken the rice of another without his consent. . . . ? Go and do wrong no more." But he who had stolen said to them, "Sirs, I have been badly treated in that I have been laid hold of by these persons on account of some rice and brought into this assembly."'

This assembly then had to judge whether the punishment given by these people was proper. After listening to his version, according to Buddha, 'They said to those who had brought him and who had spoken about the rice, "In bringing him here into our own midst you have done him a wrong; go and do not so again."' This brings into question the need for a legitimate authority to give proper punishment in accordance with the crime committed. Thus the need for creating a governing agency arose. Buddha proceeds to say,

'Then they thought, "Let us, in view of what has just happened, assemble together, and choose from our midst those who are the finest-looking, the largest, the handsomest, the strongest and let us make them lords over our fields, and they shall punish those of us who do what is punishable, and they shall recompense those of us who do what is praiseworthy, and from the produce of our fields and of the fruits we gather we will give them a portion."
'So they gathered together [and did as they decided upon], and they made one person lord over their fields with these words: "Henceforth thou shalt punish those of us who deserve punishment and thou shalt recompense those of us who deserve recompense and we will give thee a portion of the produce of our fields and of the fruits we gather."'[45]

Buddha further says, 'From his receiving the homage of many he was called "honoured by many", or *mahasammata*, and as he was lord over the fields and kept them from harm, he received the

name of "protector of the fields" or Kshatriya; and as he was a righteous man and wise, and one who brought happiness to mankind with the law, he was called "King" or Raja.' The story as set down in *Digha Nikaya* is similar, and has been summarized by R. S. Sharma. So in the second contract the people have created a state headed by a raja. In this descriptive part of Buddha's explanation there is one confusion, over whether the right to look after the fields was given to a group of people or one individual. At one place the plural is used: the people assemble together, and [choose] from out of our midst those who are finest. . . .' At the end, of course, the specification narrows down to that of a raja who was elected. However, Buddha's bias towards the Kshatriyas is clear when he uses the terms 'protector of the fields or Kshatriya'. R. S. Sharma sums up Buddha's theory very aptly. He says, 'Although the contract theory of the origin of the state is anticipated by early brahmanical literature, the first clear and developed exposition of this theory is found in the Buddhist canonical text *Digha Nikaya*, where the story of creation reminds us of the ideal state of Rousseau followed by the state of nature as depicted by Hobbes.'[46] But Sharma's comparison of Buddha's state of nature with that of Hobbes is incorrect because nowhere does Buddha give the impression that human beings were selfish and brutish, as we see in Hobbes description. In fact, Buddha's description resembles the description of Locke, if not Rousseau. But Rousseau was more a follower of Locke than Hobbes.[47]

R. S. Sharma clears the mist around whether the Buddhist contract was between one individual and the people or between a group or a class on the one hand and the people on the other. According to him, 'originally the agreement takes place between a single Kshatriya on the one hand and the people on the other, but at a later stage it is extended to the Kshatriyas as a class.'[48] Towards the end of the story of creation in the *Digha Nikaya*, it is stated that 'thus took place the origin of social circle of the nobles, *Khatt.ya mandala*.' Thus, 'What is described here is not merely the contract between the primordial Kshatriya ruler and the people but the one between the ruling class comprising the Kshatriya oligarchies on the one hand and the non-Kshatriya people on the other.' According to him, 'this obviously was intended to justify and strengthen the rule of oligarchies which were the order of the

day in Northeastern India in the age of Buddha by giving them the cloak of popular support and, thus, sanctioning payment of regular taxes by the people.'[49]

Sharma's argument implies that Buddha had a political purpose in building up this theory. But this is true of the modern Western contractualists also; Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau all had a political purpose in creating a contract which suited their needs. Hobbes wanted to restore the absolute monarchy; Locke wanted to establish parliamentary democracy and Rousseau wanted to achieve a democratic revolution in France. What is remarkable about Buddha is that as far back as the sixth century BCE he constructed a theory about the origin of the state which he depicts in the story of creation.

In terms of method and logic the Buddhist theory of the origin of the state is more creative and rational than the corresponding brahminical explanations. Politically the Buddhist theory represented the democratic aspirations of Sudras and tribals.[50] The fact that there was no mention of the place of Brahmins in the contract itself indicates that the Brahmins were to be treated like any other people who were governed by the law. According to R. S. Sharma, 'the stress is shifted from the qualities of vigour and strength, as mentioned in *Aitareya Brahmana*, to that of beauty, popularity, attractiveness and ability. In other words, physical qualities of the aesthetic type are coupled with those of head and heart, which change is obviously due to the Buddhist bias against use of force and violence.' The brahminical emphasis on physical strength is related to their theory of rule by dandaniti whereas Buddha's approach was that the ruler is conditioned by dhamma. According to Sharma, 'the only limitation proposed on the power of the ruler in this Buddhist contract theory is that he should act according to the Norm or Dhamma.' Though it is not formulated as part of the contract 'at one place it is stated that the raja pleases the people in accordance with Dhamma'.[51]

Buddha's contract is silent about the use of danda except that the people themselves ask while entering into the contract that the ruler 'punish those of us who deserve punishment'. But they also ask the ruler to reward those who do good to society. The people imposed duties on their own selves, chief among which was to pay the tax, and the ruler's main duty was to protect their fields.

Many scholars, including R. S. Sharma, interpreted this request as an appeal to protect their property. But how could Buddha who was opposed to private property in personal life support the institution of private property in land? It is likely that he was talking about communal lands which had not yet passed into the hands of monarchs as owners of land.[52] Of course, the Buddhist contract is silent about many other things, like whether the people had a right to change their ruler if he did not rule in accordance with the contract. Given the age in which he developed this theory, such limitations are bound to exist; they are the limitations of his time. Though the term 'property' was used in the first contract, in the second nowhere do we find reference to it. References to 'protection of the fields' are made repeatedly. Even in the first contract the term 'property' is used in reference to rice but not to land. This makes a lot of difference.

When such a clear exposition of the origin of the state and contract has been given by Buddha why is it that many modern Hindu scholars like Jayaswal, Altekar and Saletore ignore it? Before we comment on them let us briefly review what they have said about the Buddhist contract. Jayaswal includes a five-page chapter called 'Sacrament of Coronation Oath and the Theory of Divine Origin of Kings' in *The Hindu Polity*, in which he does not mention the Buddhist theory of social contract at all. In fact the whole chapter is devoted to defending Kautilya's dandaniti, and ends by refusing to admit that Hindu thinkers ever believed in Divine Right.

More important than this is the treatment by Saletore. Reviewing a chapter on the Buddhist concept of kingship, he explains what is stated in *Digha Nikaya* and the *Dulva* and comes to a strange conclusion. He says, 'But neither [*Digha Nikaya*] nor the *Dulva* had materially added to the ancient Hindu concept of kingship except by way of indirectly ridiculing the claims of the Kshatriyas to Kingship.'[53] What one fails to understand in Saletore's argument is why he was expecting a school of thought which had in fact emerged in opposition to Hinduism, to contribute to the Hindu concept of kingship. The exposition in the *Digha Nikaya* does not ridicule the claims of the Kshatriyas but, as R. S. Sharma rightly puts it, 'the agreement takes place between a Kshatriya and the people.' Surprisingly enough, while narrating

the story of the contract, Saletore observes, 'because he was the lord of the fields and protected them from harm, he was called Kshatriya or the protector of the fields.'[54] In the same page he comes to the contradictory conclusion that '[Buddha] ridiculed the Kshatriyas' claims to kingship.' Saletore's anti-Buddha outlook comes out very clearly when he says, 'The *Dulva* was merely echoing the ideas available in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* consciously or unconsciously.'[55] This is but a Hinduistic slant given to Buddha whose ideas in no way resembled Kautilya's. It must be noted that scholars like Saletore and Altekar took enormous pains to portray Kautilya as a positive thinker whereas their treatment of Buddha was unsympathetic and basically anti-Buddhist.

Altekar talks in a very interesting context about the Buddhist understanding of the origin of the state: 'We may passingly note that the theory of the Divine origin of state was widely held in Europe under the influence of the Christian dogma, especially in the middle ages, when the king was regarded as the appointed representative of god, ruling by divine right. Islam also shared a similar view. *The version of the Digha Nikaya resembles the above account to a great extent* [emphasis added].' He further says that the Buddhists did not believe in god and so Brahmadeva as creator of the first king and code naturally does not figure in their theory. But we are told that in the dim and distant past, there was a golden age, when men who had ethereal and refulgent bodies lived in virtue and happiness. Somehow there was a fall from this state; there arose anarchy and chaos, and people wondered how to put an end to it. Eventually there arose on the scene a person deemed *mahajanasammata*.[56] Altekar's treatment gives one the impression that the theory is full of contradictions. He talks about Christian and Islamic Divine Right and says, 'The version of *Digha Nikaya* resembles the above', and in the next sentence he says, 'The Buddhists did not believe in god, therefore, the creation of Brahmadeva as the creator of the First King and Code did not figure in it.' He uses phrases like 'there arose anarchy and chaos'. Nowhere, either in the *Dulva* story which is presented here in full, or in the story found in the *Digha Nikaya* which Sharma dealt with in detail, do we come across images of anarchy and chaos. Although Sharma says that 'heavenly life degenerated into earthly life',[57] the story does not speak of the transformation in these

terms; in fact it deals with it very dialectically.

Comparison with Western Theories

When compared to the modern Western contractualists, it is well to remember that Buddha predates them by two thousand years. Theories of the state and state power became necessary for Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau in the context of the industrial revolution and also in that of emerging parliamentary institutions which were transforming socio-political systems from feudal to capitalist. Western contractualists had the advantage of reference to the whole body of political theory that had developed by then, and they could readily avail of a written and codified thought-system. For Buddha, there was no such advantage as he developed his theory 2600 years ago in the context of emerging systems of slavery and monarchy. From the days of Hobbes, who visualized an anarchic State of Nature, to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who visualized a primitive communist society, where equality amidst scarcity and ignorance amidst primitiveness were the order of the day, a lot of anthropological data have become available. In fact Marx and Engels had to amend their formulation from 'the history of all hitherto existing society' to 'all written history' because of Haxthausen's and Morgan's discoveries of common ownership of property.[58] In spite of the fact that Marxism is an advanced materialist theory, when it comes to the question of speculation with regards to primitive society it is fraught with limitations. Yet there is a need to speculate in order to come to some assessment of society at different stages. From this point of view the limitations of Buddha are many and understandably so.

Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, thus, were better placed to construct, even it was speculative, a theory of social contract because of the age in which they lived. Yet a reassessment of these theories brings out their merits and demerits, their strengths and limitations. Today Marxism and dialectical materialism have given us enormous scope to study each theory and the socioeconomic basis from which the theory developed.

Studied in the socio-political context of Buddha, the theory of the origin of the state that he constructed shows the maturity of

his mind. From Buddha's theoretical formulation on the one hand and the Divine Right approach of Hindu thinkers on the other we should be able to reconstruct the spectrum of political thought in ancient India on a sound footing. We can now come to an assessment as to how Buddha and the Hindu thinkers were ranged in opposition. Sensing the dangers posed by such a theory modern scholars who were admirers of Kautilya and Manu attempted to condemn the social contract theory itself. Altekar, commenting on the importance of the social contract theory says, 'It is now generally recognized that the contract theory of origin of Government is bad history and worse logic.'[59] But surely creating a state out of social contradictions is more historical than creating a state from the word of god? It must now be accepted that Buddha is the first contractualist. With all his limitations, he becomes the forerunner and father of all social contractualists.

NOTES

1. Jean Bodin (1530-1597) was a French thinker who witnessed the Huguenot wars between Protestants and Catholics. This led him to write *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, outlining the modern sovereign state and the duties of the king. Romila Thapar has used the term *rajanyas* as equivalent to 'ruling family'. See *From Lineage to State* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 30-33, 14.
2. Thapar opines that the Vedic texts which provide this evidence are the Rig Veda and what is generally termed the later Vedic literature (namely, the Sama, Yajur and Atharva Vedas together with their associated texts the *Upanishads, Aranyakas* and *Brahmanas*). The suggested data for the earlier sections of the Rig Veda would be sometimes between the latter part of the second millennium and the early first millennium BCE. The later Vedic literature is dated closer the mid-first millennium BCE ranging from the eighth to the sixth centuries. The two epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, are quite evidently compiled at various periods. They were being edited until as late as the mid-first millennium CE but sections of the texts still relate to earlier societies, possibly going back to the early first millennium BCE and perhaps to some even earlier memories. See Thapar, 'The Historian and the Epic', in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental*

Research Institute 9 (1979): 199-213; Thapar, 'Exile and the Kingdom', in *Some Thoughts on the Ramayana* (Bangalore: n.p., 1978), p. 15.

3. Nersesyants, *Ancient Greece*, p. 7.
4. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 115.
5. *Digha Nikaya*, p. 26.
6. The brahminical concepts of soul and punarjanma promised rewards in heaven, but in fact were making human life miserable: such misery was expalined away as due to earlier births and karma.
7. In *Digha Nikaya*, it is said that where there is no contact of any sort there cannot be any reaction of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch or imagination, p. 27. Also see *Digha Nikaya*, pp. 58, 121.
8. Rhys Davids, *Buddhism: Its History and Literature* (London and New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons) p. 29.
9. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 35.
10. Marx and Engels paid rich tributes to ancient Greek political thinkers for the simple reason that they initiated a dialectical debate on the interlinks of economic and political systems. Had they been aware of the Buddhist methodology and the dialectical and materialist outlook of Buddha they would have perhaps paid richer tributes to him. See Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), pp. 63–127.
11. For more on Pythagoras, see Nersesyants, Ancient Greece, pp. 25–28.
12. See *Digha Nikaya*, pp. 25–28
13. See Majumdar, *Corporate Life.*, pp. 219-220 where he describes the remarkable achievements of Buddha in establishing democratic institutions.
14. See Alexander Platigorsky, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Thought, Essays in Interpretation* (London: Curzon, 1984), p. 3. Platigorsky elaborately discusses Buddhist methodology.
15. Though Kautilya lived about 300 years later than Buddha, he reflected the synthesis of the earlier brahminical ideology. After a careful examination of available literature D. P. Chattopadhyaya has said that the policy of Kautilya was put in actual practice long before he theoretically formulated it. As Kautilya himself mentions, there is a long list of predecessors who had formulated his theory earlier. See Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 177.
16. Kautilya, *Arthasastra*, Adhikarna 11. Freely translated by Chattopadhyaya, see *Lokayata*, pp. 172-173.
17. For details see Kancha Ilaiah, 'Kautilyan Political Culture'. In *Frontier*

(August 6, 13 August 1987).

18. See Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 42; also Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 242. Majumdar recognized the fact that Kautilya single-mindedly worked for the disintegration of republican democratic systems. He records that his truly remarkable power of inventing ingenious devices were used only to sow dissension among the republics.
19. According to Jayaswal the term 'gana' signified the form of government, while 'sangha' on the other hand signified the state. If this is so, then the Buddhists' naming their organization 'sangha' indicates that Buddhism was not a religion but a political ideology. See *Hindu Polity*, p. 24.
20. Jayaswal says, 'In the days of Panini, Buddhist and Jaina sanghas either did not exist [and in that case Panini's date would be about 600 BCE] or they had not become important.' See *Hindu Polity*, p. 28.
21. Trevor Ling, *The Buddha's Philosophy of Man* (London: Dent, 1981). Ling suggests that the Buddhist sanghas were operating as a link between tribal republican sanghas and the kingly states. See his introduction, p. xix.
22. *Arhats* means wanderers, ascetics or foreigners. The tribal republics were known for their treatment of such wanderers. For a detailed story see *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*, pp. 1-11. The Sanskrit 'arhat' is related to the Pali 'arahant' which came to mean 'saint' or 'perfected one' in later Buddhist terminology.
23. *Digha Nikaya, Maha Parinibbana Sutta*, trans. Rhys Davids, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* (London: Henry Frowde, 1910), pp. 78-83, see also Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, where he quotes the same passage to explain the views of Buddha. Also see Trevor Ling, *Buddha's Philosophy*, p. xvi. He calls Ajatasatru's attempt an all-out military campaign against the Vajjian federation, one of the few republican federations which at that time had survived the onslaught of the monarchical attack in Northern India. According to Trevor Ling Buddha was worried about the future of republican federation itself.
24. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 174.
25. According to Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 246, in the *Atthakatha* detailed documentation is available which explains the unscrupulous methods adopted by Ajatasatru to sow seeds of dissension among the Vajjians to destroy them, in spite of the fact that Buddha advised against it.
26. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 42.

27. It is important to note that even Majumdar devotes a whole chapter to the Buddhist sangha to examine the religious corporations of ancient India. Even in his analysis sangha life comes out as more political than religious. See Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, pp. 271-306
28. Such an argument has proved to be dangerous much later. In 1989 when the controversy over the Ram Janmabhoomi and the Babri Masjid arose, Hindu communal elements started arguing that Buddhism was not a separate school but part of Hinduism. They put forth this argument, because some progressive Indian historians raised the issue that as a majority of so called Hindu temples were old Buddhist shrines, the Hindus (that is, the Viswa Hindu Parishad) should allow the Buddhists to take them back. In retaliation Hindu communal forces started claiming Buddhism to be indivisible from Hinduism.
29. See Majumdar's analysis of Kautilya and Buddha in his *Corporate Life*, pp. 242-243, which in many respects corroborates my arguments, though the tone and tenor and the conclusions he draws are different.
30. Quoted in Sabine, *History*, 4th ed., p. 429.
31. Julian H. Franklin, *John Locke and the Theory of Sovereignty* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 90-91.
32. Ronald Grimsley, *The Philosophy of Rousseau* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), see the chapter on 'The State of Nature and the Nature of Man', pp. 29-42. It must be noted here that 'rice' in this text, like 'bread' or 'meat' in the Bible, stands rhetorically for 'food.'
33. There is a controversy with regard to the dates of Manu and Kautilya. Some historians believe that Manu lived much before Kautilya, maybe around the same period that Buddha lived. But some say that Manu lived later than Kautilya. According to them, Manu's codification of laws reflected the post-Kautilyan period also. I do not intend to go into this controversy at all. I take both these thinkers as representatives of a particular ideology and analyse their ideas from that point of view. In the vast aeon of ancient Indian history and institutional growth, a hundred years this side or that does not make much difference. Besides, the tendency of transcribers to add to and edit the text has made notions of a single author problematic.
34. See Saletore, *Political Thought*, pp. 66-70.
35. The terms 'devatas' and 'rakshasas' are used to denote the Aryans (fair people) and the Dravidians (black people). A number of Dravida scholars, of late, have argued that these theories operate to justify racial discrimination.

36. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 73.
37. Lord Vishnu is said to have incarnated ten times. Gautama Buddha is also said to be one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu.
38. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 17.
39. Ḍharma, according to brahminical theoreticians, does not mean justice for all, but the maintenance of varnadharma. This aspect we shall examine in detail in another chapter.
40. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 228.
41. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 73.
42. *Dulva* is a Tibetan word which means 'Life of Buddha'.
43. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*. Rockhill only translates the original *Dulva* into English and gives it the shape of biography, pp. 5-6 .
44. C. Maxey Chester, *Political Philosophies* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1950), p. 225.
45. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 6. Here the word 'their' indicates that the thief was taken to a group of people who must have gathered for some other purpose.
46. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 65.
47. See Kancha Ilaiah, 'Buddhism as Political Philosophy' (*Social Science Probings* 3, 4 (Dec. 1986) : 424.
48. Sharma takes this from *Digha Nikaya*, III, 93, SBB, see *Aspects*, p. 68.
49. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 69.
50. According to Trevor Ling, Buddha compromised with the monarchical state under the prevailing political conditions. His concept of state is different from the brahminical concept of kingship. In the brahminical concept the king had cosmic and divine roles. See Ling, *Buddha's Philosophy*, p. xvii.
51. Sharma, *Aspects*, p.68.
52. As we have seen in the third chapter, when Buddha asked the farmers at work in the fields 'who they were', their reply was that they were the 'property of the king'. From that time he developed a contempt for private property itself. This attitude of Buddha we can see in his practice throughout his life.
53. Saletore, *Political Thought*, p. 324.
54. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 68.
55. Saletore, *Political Thought*, pp. 342, 325
56. Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 29.
57. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 66.
58. In a footnote to the *Communist Manifesto* Engels adds, in 1847, that the

pre-history of society, the social organization existing previous to recorded history, was all but unknown. Since then, Haxthausen has discovered common ownership of land in Russia, Maurer proved it to be the social foundation from which all Teutonic races started in history and by and by village communities were found to be or have been the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland. The inner organization of this primitive communistic society was laid bare in its typical form by Morgan's crowning discovery of the true nature of the 'gens and its relation to the tribe'. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 108-109.

59. Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 31.

5

Justice, Democracy and Administration

Buddha lived at a time when various political systems flourished in different regions of the land. Though there are several instances in Buddhist literature of such heterogeneity, it is sufficient to mention the account of a group of merchants from the middle country of north India who went to the Deccan. The king of the Deccan asked them, 'Gentlemen merchants, who is the king that rules over there?' They replied that 'some are under the rule of the ganas while others are under the rule of the monarchs.'[1] But the main trend was that tribal oligarchies were transforming themselves into monarchical states; Bimbisara, who established the first monarchical state, was Buddha's contemporary. And the tendency of the monarchical state was to centralize political power and make the system rely entirely on one individual, the king. For the political philosophers of the period, there was a need to take a position as to which system had more meaning in terms of the day-to-day life of the people. This is where the Vedic and the Buddhist views of the political system seem to have differed.[2] Chattopadhyaya makes the point categorically clear that Buddha, alone of all contemporary prophets, could offer to the people of his time the dream of liberty and equality and fraternity.[3] This dream was not, and could not be, the same as that envisioned by Rousseau and Voltaire in Europe in the late eighteenth century.[4]

The Eurocentric or Orientalist approach of colonial political scientists such as James Mill and William Jones completely denied any democratic tradition to India. In their perception, the Indians viewed liberty as a curse rather than a boon even when it was given to them.[5] At no point, according to the colonialists, was there any concept or practice of liberty in India. Hindu political

analysts like Jayaswal made attempts to disprove this thinking, but as we have seen, Jayaswal's arguments got mixed up. He tried to prove that the ancient Hindu political system was partly republican of the Athenian type, and partly of a constitutional monarchical type such as Great Britain. While it may be correct to assert that the ancient republics were of the Athenian type, it is not correct to compare the mahajanapada and monarchical systems with Great Britain's monarchies. D. R. Bhandarkar and R. C. Majumdar, according to R. S. Sharma, only followed in Jayaswal's footsteps.[6]

However, our concern in this chapter is to examine the concepts of justice, democracy and the nature of the administration during Gautama's period. We will see what implications Buddhist ideas of justice and democracy had for contemporary society, and what these concepts meant to both the Vedic Hindu and the Buddhist school. It is important to see whether Buddha stood in contrast to Hindu ideological practice.

The Hindu Concept of Justice

There is a controversy with regard to the use of the term 'dharma' as equivalent to the Western concept of justice.[7] Some Hindu writers used dharma as equivalent to justice and some used danda in this way. We shall treat here the concept of dharma as approximating the ancient Western concept of justice, but not danda, for the simple reason that in everyday language dharma is understood as justice and danda as punishment.[8] However, we must remember that the Hindu notion of dharma deals with varna-dharma or caste justice whereas the Western notion implies class justice. Buddha's concept of dhamma is entirely different from the Hindu dharma which we shall examine in the course of our analysis.

Kautilya's Dharma

Saletore refuted the judgement of A. B. Keith that the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya did not represent the fine flower of Indian political thought, asserting that he holds the same position in Indian thought as Plato does to the Western mind.[9] Since there is such an emphatic assertion on Kautilya's behalf, let us examine his views

on dharma, for the *Arthashastra* is regarded especially as an authentic source because of the emphasis it laid on this concept. According to Kautilya, dharma and adharma as he projected them in the *Arthashastra* only reflected the stand taken by the three Vedas.[10] His concept of dharma binds both the citizens and the rulers. What becomes dharma for the people becomes the obligation of the ruler and what becomes dharma for the ruler becomes the obligation of the people.[11] 'The people (loka) consists of four castes and four orders of religious life, and when governed by the king with his sceptre will keep to their respective paths, even devotedly adhering to their respective duties and occupations.'[12] According to R. S. Sharma, Kautilya insists that every varna must perform its functions and 'the person who observes his duty *attains heaven and infinite bliss* [emphasis added].' If he violates his duty, the world is destroyed on account of the confusion of castes. Not only does Kautilya instruct the king never to allow the people to transgress their caste boundaries, but if they deviate or violate them danda has to be invoked. If the four castes adhere to the caste system they will prosper and never perish.[13]

Actually Kautilyan dharma adheres to the principle of 'might is right', as the insistence on maintaining the caste structure is beneficial to the Brahmin-Kshatriya combine. In the caste hierarchy the Sudras were reduced to the status of slaves, and what was worse, the caste structure was attached to the occupational division of labour. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the idea of Chandalas was already in vogue by the time of Kautilya and untouchability was already a practice.[14] In this situation, defining dharma as 'maintaining the caste system' is blatantly intended only to control and subdue the Sudras and untouchables. What was Kautilya doing for the tribals? He was helping the state to control and manipulate them, to disintegrate their nations into small fragments and subsume them into the caste-bound mode of existence. The exposition provided in Manu's writings and in the *Mahabharata* (the '*Shanti Parva*' or the Gita) does not differ in essence.

Thus in Hindu literature there was more emphasis on danda.[15] In the *Satapatha Brahmana* the king is represented as the wielder of the danda while he was at the same time, immune from the punishment.[16] Saletore says that danda, as given in the *Satapatha*

Brahmana, justifies the emphasis given in the *Manusmriti* on the primeval nature of the science of punishment. Can we call methods of brutal punishment 'science' as Saletore called them? Somnath Dhar who devoted an entire book to Kautilya says 'Kautilya's concept of dandaniti is the pivot of the entire social fabric on which depended the well-being of the State. Dandaniti represents the science of politics.'[17] Though Saletore, Bhandarkar and Ghoshal have laboured to prove that dandaniti is subordinate to dharma, the fact that the caste system, which was a byproduct of this ideology, arrested the mobility of the people, indicates that dharma acted more in favour of brahminical forces. Through the same ideology the tribals were suppressed and the brahminical supremacy was maintained. This is a clear proof of the primacy of dandaniti over dharma in Hindu philosophy. In answer to Hindu dandaniti, what does Buddhist dhamma say? Modern Hindu thinkers have failed to understand the significance of Buddhist dhamma and have not analysed it.[18]

Buddha on Justice

Ambedkar summed up Buddha's dhamma and the philosophy that underlay it by extensively quoting from the *Suttas*. According to Buddha, dhamma is righteousness which means right relationship between man and man in all spheres of life. Ambedkar likens the Buddha's dhamma to equality, saying, 'When there are two men living in relation to each other they must find a place for dhamma whether they like it or not. Neither can escape it. Society may choose the police, that is dictatorship, as an instrument of Government, or society may choose dhamma plus the magistrate.' In Buddha's dhamma there is no place for danda. According to him, dhamma consists of *prajnana* and *karuna*. Prajnana, according to Buddha, is 'understanding'. Ambedkar maintains that Buddha made prajnana one of the two cornerstones of his dhamma because he did not wish to leave any room for superstition.[19] Buddha repeatedly asked his disciples not to give scope to desire and greed. This appeal was not meant only in terms of the personal life of individuals; it was also applicable to rulers who were trying to expand their states, through conquest and aggrandizement, at the expense of neighbouring small republican or

democratic states. Moreover, society was riddled with caste and class distinctions and brahminical law was justifying the use of danda in order to perpetuate the enslavement of vast sections. Buddha opposed such enslavement, and thus dhamma to him was freedom.

There is a tale in the *Vinaya Pitaka (Dulva)* which brings out Buddha's intentions very clearly. As Buddha sits on the bank of the Nairanjana, the Evil One tells him, 'Blessed One, the time to die has come,' meaning that Buddha was ill and might die soon. But Buddha answered him, 'Mara, as long as my disciples have not become wise and of quick understanding, as long as the bhikkhus, the bhikkhunis and the lay disciples of either sex are not able to refute their adversaries according to the dhamma, as long as my moral teaching has not been spread far and wide so long will I not pass away.'[20] Who could these adversaries that Buddha talked of be, but the brahminical thinkers? In his tone one can hear his zeal to spread his own concept of political justice in opposition to the prevailing 'justice' of total inequality.

As Ambedkar explains, in Buddhist philosophy the definition of dhamma completely differs from the Hindu one of dharma. According to Buddha, maintaining the purity of life is dhamma, reaching perfection of life is dhamma; living in nibbana[21] is dhamma; giving up craving is dhamma; to believe that karma is the instrument of moral order is dhamma. In order to bring out the distinction between Hindu dharma and Buddha's dhamma Ambedkar lists what is *not* dhamma for Gautama and his sangha. 'The belief in supernatural things is not dhamma; the belief in Ishwara [God] is not an essential part of dhamma; dhamma based on union with Brahma is a false dhamma, belief in soul is not dhamma; belief in sacrifice is not dhamma,' and so on. This kind of Buddhist understanding of justice, though it does not appear to be directly related to the state, has many implications for the state and society.[22]

As the Buddhist concept of justice is based on non-violence and equality, it is the antithesis of the Hindu concept of dandaniti, which is essentially a coercive apparatus and is thus absent from Buddha's exposition. The Buddhist sangha, way of life, in contrast to the Hindu social structure, operated purely on the basis of norms and moral principles and did not depend on physical

coercion.[23] The sangha was influencing people morally, not compelling them through physical subjugation. This attitude of equality and lack of physical coercion comes out very clearly in the debates between Devadatta and Buddha. Although Devadatta in fact attempts to kill Buddha several times, Gautama and his disciples only try to isolate him; they never use force against him. When Sanakkhutta wants to leave the sangha, Buddha simply allows him to do so and to live as he likes.[24] This contrasts with the Hindu attitude to those who merely wished to live differently from the norm the Brahmins promulgated as the law.

The political implications of such a concept of dhamma are varied. As R. S. Sharma said, 'The only limitation proposed on the power of the ruler in the Buddhist contract theory was that they should act according to dhamma.' Here he defines dhamma as a *norm*, without the superstitious overtones that the Hindu dharma has. He further adds that 'the obligations imposed on the rulers are impressive and may lead us to think that they are in line with the republican outlook of the age and the reformist attitude of Buddhism.'[25] The Buddhist dhamma is similar in many respects to the Platonic concept of justice. Though Plato's justice allows class distinctions, it consists, like Buddha's dhamma, of a human approach to the problems of human society.[26] Ambedkar writes that the 'official gospel of Hinduism' is inequality. For the doctrine of *chaturvarna* is the concrete embodiment of this gospel of inequality. As against this Buddha stood for equality.'[27]

On Democracy

This is one aspect on which the opinions of Indian scholars differ greatly. The Western proposition was that there had been no democratic traditions in India, and to disprove this assumption, as we have shown, Hindu scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries took up the study of ancient democratic institutions. K. P. Jayaswal's *Hindu Polity* and R. C. Majumdar's *Corporate Life in Ancient India* were two major early studies written largely with this aim, and the works of R. S. Sharma, A. S. Altekar and B. A. Saletore followed them. Though in this enterprise Buddhist literature—particularly Buddha's original statements—were used to a great extent by all commentators, somehow they did not portray

Buddha as a political thinker as they did Kautilya and Manu.

The Hindu nationalist scholars listed several bodies which functioned as democratic republican institutions in ancient India, of which the most important are the gana, *vidatha*, *sabha*, and *samiti*. To explain these institutions briefly, the gana is a tribal oligarchical structure, sometimes identified with the *gotra* system. All political decisions here would be taken with the involvement of all people.[28] The vidatha is a Vedic institution defined as a family council. According to R. S. Sharma it can be compared with the councils of the Iroquois, which served generally as a democratic assembly of all the male and female members of the gana.[29] Though women participated in this assembly, in later Hindu institutions their participation was prohibited. The sabha was an assembly of learned people. The Buddha *Jatakas* themselves give a clear exposition of the sabha, as a *Jataka* verse says that 'the sabha which has no good people is no sabha and the people who do not speak out dhamma [justice] are not good people.' It also says that 'good people are those who avoid personal sentiments and speak out justice,' Since dharma meant two different things for Hindus and Buddhists, the Hindu sabha probably perpetuated varna-dharma. The samiti appears to be a much later institution than the sabha. The word 'samiti' means 'meeting together', which Jayaswal translates as 'assembly'. He thought the institution was of Vedic origin, though other scholars doubt this interpretation as the samiti had either a political or religious head.[30] According to R. S. Sharma, some political samitis were attended by rajas and they may have had religious functions, while priests headed others.[31] However, all these institutions were rooted in tribal democratic traditions.

Not many scholars have studied the nature of the sangha, by which name the Buddhist assembly came to be known. The Buddhist slogan '*Buddham Saranam Gacchami, Dharmam Saranam Gacchami, Sangham Saranam Gacchami*'[32] too is well known. Jayaswal discusses the sangha concept in some detail. Though prominence is given to Panini's version, Jayaswal brings out clearly that for Panini the word 'sangha' is a technical term denoting a political body.[33] While describing this he comments significantly that in the days of Panini, Buddhist and Jaina sanghas either did not exist or had not yet become important. Jayaswal himself states that

Panini lived at a later time than Buddha, in which case the sangha was already established in his time. Even after Buddha's death, the sangha continued to spread through the work of the first, second, third and fourth councils.[34] However, Jayaswal accepts that the sanghas were Republics comparable to Hellenic city-states.[35] Their theory and practice constituted Buddhism's major contributious to Indian culture for generations to come.

According to D. P. Chattopadhyaya, Buddha radically departed from other social organizers in making the surviving free tribes of his times the models for his sangha. The sangha was consciously designed to be a philosophical substitute for customs and institutions that were being systematically annihilated in the wider world.[36] The *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* gives several accounts that indicate this aspect of the sangha's creation. At a critical stage in Indian history when the free tribes were being ruthlessly exterminated or brought within the orbit of expanding state power, and the people were experiencing the rise of new values on the ruins of tribal equality, Buddha modelled his sangha on tribal society and advised his bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to mould their lives according to the principles of that society.[37] In building his sangha, Buddha had provided the people of his time with a semblance of the lost reality, of the dying tribal collective.

Buddha's success over many of his contemporary prophets, namely Purana Kassapa, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kahhayana, Makkali Gosala and Vardhamana Mahavira, lies in his adopting this sangha system, through which he could evolve an ideal microcosm of the epoch, wonderful in its internal consistency. But given this, how did the system actually work? What were the principles that governed it and how democratic was it? To answer these questions, two aspects of Buddhist democracy have to be studied: (*i*) how it was expressed in institutional structures, and (*ii*), how it governed interpersonal relationships in sangha life, and the culture and behaviour of sangha members.

Institutional Democracy

Chattopadhyaya lists three aspects important to the study of the democratic content of sangha life and these relate to (*i*) procedure of entry into the sangha, (*ii*) internal administration, and (*iii*) the

personal or private property within it.[38] A study of sangha democracy indicates the nature of Buddha's thinking and the practice in institutions that he established.

Admission into the Buddhist sangha presupposes the performance of the rituals of *pabbajja* and *upasampada*. The person who wished to join the sangha had to shave his head. However, changing into yellow robes was not compulsory.[39] Actually the upasampada was an elaborate method of obtaining the sanction of all the full members of the sangha for the candidate's admission into the sangha.[40] In this respect the Buddhist sangha was more advanced than the tribal sabhas and samitis as membership in those institutions was based on kinship. But Buddha's sangha was open to all those who accepted the basic principles or rules, which were that they had to beg or produce their food; that they must not own property, and that they must preach to all classes of people.[41]

The *Mahavagga* of the *Vinaya Pitaka* gives us a detailed picture of the process of admission into the sanghas. Buddha himself declares the guidelines for admitting any new bhikkhu or bhikkhuni into the sangha as follows:

> Then the Blessed One thus addressed the bhikkhus, 'I prescribe, O bhikkhus, that you confer the upasampada ordination by a formal act of the order in which the announcement *natti* is followed by three questions.
> And you ought, O bhikkhus, to confer the upasampada ordination in this way. Let a learned, competent bhikkhu proclaim the following announcement before the sangha.
> Let the sangha, Reverend Sirs, hear this person N. N. who desires to receive the upasampada ordination . If the sangha is ready let the sangha confer on N. N., the upasampada ordination with N. N. as *upajjhaya*. This is the natti . . .'

After this statement had been repeated twice, the proposal would be put to a vote. The text further says, 'Let any one of the venerable brethren who is in favour of the upasampada ordination of N. N. with N. N. as upajjhaya, be silent, and any one who is not in favour of it, speak.' If the majority approved the admission the person was treated as admitted.[42]

When Upali, a barber who later became one of the three closest followers of Buddha, was admitted, the majority approved his admission and only Devadatta sternly opposed it. The *Dulva* says that as Devadatta would not consent, Buddha asked him to bow down, saying, 'Hast thou not entered the order to cast off pride?' Devadatta, however, refused. This was the first time he disobeyed Buddha, and from then on he continued to create trouble in the sangha.[43]

What comes out very clearly from this theory and practice is that Buddha was not only very firm about the need for democracy, but he was willing to deal with dissenters democratically. This is not to imply that the rules and procedures did not change from time to time. According to Chattopadhyaya, as the sangha developed, new rules had to be formulated for the upasampada ceremony, though its essential character remained the same.[44] Not only admissions, but all other matters relating to the sangha were discussed democratically, as has been elaborately studied by Jayaswal. The Buddhist sangha had a detailed protocol for assemblies. One person would introduce the subject for discussion, as in the above example, one would collect votes, one would count them, one would make the seating arrangements and so on. Jayaswal gives a very relevant example from the *Vinaya Pitaka*. Here is a resolution moved at the instance of Buddha himself.

> 'The Bhikkhu Uvala being examined in the midst of the sangha with an offense when he has denied it, then confessed it, when he confessed it, then denies it. He makes counter charges, and speaks lies which he knows to be such. If the sangha is meeting, let the sangha carry out the punishment *(Tassapapivyasuka-Kamma)* against the Bhikkhu Uvala.'

This is the motion. The same is repeated twice and then put to the vote. Then it is said, 'whosoever of the venerable ones approves of the punishment being carried out let him keep silent. Whosoever approves not thereof, let him speak.'[45]

In this case all the members remained silent, so the punishment was deemed approved. We do not have an indication as to what the penalty was, but we can assume Uvala was only censured, as expulsion was treated as an extreme measure by the Buddhist

sanghas. We also do not know whether Uvala was given a chance to explain himself. In tribal democracies the accused was given a chance to explain before the assembly, so the sangha may have had a similar custom. This practice continued even after Buddha's death.[46]

In all the debates the sangha used to observe strictly the requirement of a quorum. According to some commentators twenty was the quorum in local assemblies. Any order passed without a quorum was not treated as an official injunction, hence there was probably some oral instruction also. It may be that Buddha and his three top disciples, Maha Kassapa, Upali and Ananda, at times gave oral directions which the bhikkhus respected. There was also mention of the whip whose responsibility was to see that for every meeting the required number of bhikkhus were gathered.[47]

There is a detailed discription of voting in Buddhist literature. The process was called *chhanda*, literally meaning 'wish' or 'desire'. The right to exercise one's vote was unrestricted. The votes of those members who were ill or disabled, or unable to attend the meeting, would also be collected; failure to do so was taken as a serious offence. After this collection, if the majority decided the issue needed a person's involvement in the debate, the absentees' votes would not be counted.[48] Jayaswal describes the procedures in the *Mahavagga* as follows: 'If the bhikkhus at a *natti-dutiya* are as many bhikkhus as are entitled to vote but if the chhanda of those who have to declare their chhanda has not been conveyed [to the assembly] and if the bhikkhus present protest, such an act is performed by an incomplete congregation,' in such a situation the votes of the absentees are not counted. The sangha could decide to use the secret ballot to decide an issue, or it could attempt to ascertain through speeches the opinions of the majority—what we would call today a 'voice vote'. Upali's admission and Uvala's punishment seem to have been decided by voice vote, while the secret ballot was well known to the sangha. Jayaswal says that the voting was done using coloured tickets. There was a *salakagrahaka*, 'taker of tickets', appointed by the whole sangha who explained the significance of the colours, and took the vote either secretly or openly—like a modern returning officer.

What is interesting is that even the appointment of the returning officer had to be approved by the sangha. The required

qualifications of the returning officer and the appointment procedure are recorded in the *Chullavagga* as follows: 'A bhikkhu who shall be possessed of five qualifications shall be appointed as taker of the voting tickets, one who does not walk in partiality, one who does not walk in malice, one who does not walk in folly or walk in fear, one who knows what votes have been taken and what have not been taken.'[49] The procedure of the appointment was to obtain the consent of the candidate for the job and then decide by voice vote.

The sangha would also appoint committees by vote to whom they delegated work, as Jayaswal records. The scriptures enjoin the bhikkhus to 'settle the case by referring to a jury or commission'. If the committee failed to decide the issue it had to be handed back to the sangha and settled by a majority vote. There are a number of instances of such delegation to committees, and even a reference to providing representation to different regions when the issue required it. The *Chullavagga* says, 'During the inquiry into this matter there has been much pointless talk among us. Let the sangha delegate four bhikkhus of the East and four bhikkhus of the West to settle this question.' In settling all these issues dhamma was the guiding principle, and once decided the issue could not be reopened. The *Chullavagga* suggests that such reopening is *pachittiya*, an offense, and anyone attempting to do so would be tried by the sangha.[50] Finally, there are allusions to referenda, but this could have been merely a Buddhist opinion on how to elect the king or ruler. However, the practice in tribal democratic republics was that bigger matters relating to the state had to be resolved by taking the opinion of all the people, and the Buddhists could have adopted it.

Buddha himself guided the sangha in following all these procedures, and he seems to have seen with complete clarity the laws that had to be passed for their well-being. He said,

> 'There are, O bhikkhus, six kinds of official acts which a sangha can perform; an unlawful act, an act performed by an incomplete congregation, an act performed by a complete congregation, a seemingly lawful act performed by a complete congregation, and a lawful act performed by a complete congregation.'

In his view only the lawful act performed by a complete congregation truly reflected the spirit of dhamma. He further said,

> 'If an official act, O bhikkhus, is performed unlawfully by an incomplete congregation, it is no real act and ought not to be performed. If an official act, O bhikkhus, is performed against which the bhikkhus present protest, which is unlawful, objectionable, and invalid, it is no real act and ought not to be performed.'[51]

No doubt the Buddha must have drawn heavily on the practice of contemporary democratic republics. Jayaswal very rightly says that Buddha only adopted tribal procedural rules for particular kinds of cases arising in his organization. He himself came from one of the republics and mostly lived amongst republican communities; he was perfectly familiar with their working system and adopted it to the benefit of his order.[52] But what many of these scholars have not examined is the democratic culture and the pattern of interpersonal relationships within that culture that the Buddhist sangha established.

Interpersonal Relations

It is one thing to adopt a democratic institutional structure and another to make it part of the culture of a people. Inculcating democratic behaviour in day-to-day life is perhaps more difficult than ensuring the democratic functioning of institutions. Buddha seems to have made it a point to behave democratically and make others behave so. The most important example is the discussion between Ananda and Buddha over the admission of women into the sangha.

Maha Prajapati, queen of Kapilavattu and stepmother to Buddha, approached him with the intention of joining the sangha. She walked a long distance to reach him and asked that women be allowed to enter the order and strive for perfection. 'I beseech the Blessed One to let women become bhikkhunis and live in purity,' she pleaded, but Buddha refused to admit them. So she sat down outside the house and wept. There Ananda saw her and asked what was the matter. She told him what her plea was. She had

come all the way from Kapilavattu to Vesali, where Buddha was then staying. Ananda, seeing her with swollen feet, weary and distressed, pleaded on her behalf, but Buddha again turned down the proposal to found an order of nuns. Then Ananda entered into a debate with him. Had he not declared, Ananda reminded Buddha, that women too were capable of attaining nirvana? Buddha agreed he had. Then Ananda asked, 'How does the Blessed One deny the highest benefit to one who has suckled him?' Finally Buddha said, 'Ananda, if women enter the order, the rules of the order will not last long. However, Ananda, if Gautami Maha Prajapati accepts the eight following rules she may enter the order.' Subsequently a proposal must have been put before the sangha and got its approval. Though Buddha was strongly opposed to admitting women into the sangha, he was forced to enter a debate on the question, was proved wrong according to Buddhist principles, and had to accept his mistake and admit women into the sangha.[53]

To cite one more example, as Buddha grew older he wished to take a personal attendant. He put a proposal to the sangha. Some persons came forward but they too were old, and Buddha told them they themselves required attendants. Then Moggallana suggested Ananda, and Buddha agreed. Buddha and Moggallanna asked Ananda if he would accept the job. Ananda at first refused, saying,

> 'It is a difficult matter to wait on Buddha. As it is difficult to approach a mighty sixty-year-old elephant of the Matanga forest, strong with great curved tusks and deepest chest, revelling in the fight when he is ready for the fray, so is it difficult to serve the Blessed Buddha. Therefore choose me not as the Blessed One's attendant.'[54]

Later on he was persuaded to accept the post and served Buddha till his death.[55] But his statement brings out a remarkable internal democratic culture. Had sangha life been hierarchical, it would have been impossible for a young disciple like Ananda to speak so jocularly in the presence of Buddha himself. There are a number of similar examples. The disciples joking and disagreeing with each other was considered part of sangha life. In fact even

Devadatta's disruptive role within the sangha was always contained with scrupulous observance of democratic practice.

This must have been in total contrast to Hindu hierarchical life. Buddha was opposed to nepotism and favouritism. His son Rahula joined the order when he was six years old, but never became a prominent bhikkhu. Buddha made attempts to convert his father but did not succeed. Devadatta, who was Buddha's cousin, repeatedly tried to proclaim himself the most important bhikkhu in the sangha, once saying, 'I will guide them, and in the meanwhile the Blessed One will be able to live in comfort, without any preoccupation.' When the Blessed One heard his proposal he said 'Thou fool, thinkest thou that I will commit the care of the congregation to an eater of filth and spittle like thou, when I do not entrust it to virtuous men like Cariputra or Moggallana?'[56] This sums up his attitude towards people who did not maintain sangha standards.

The Administrative System

The Buddhist sangha also developed a highly advanced administrative system. Buddha gave thought to the management of assemblies (*viharas*), maintaining records of the belongings of sangha inmates and so on. The bhikkhus had to maintain records of every particular, and several committees were set up by the sangha to look after these specialized tasks.[57]

With regard to the general assemblies and administrative structure R. C. Majumdar sums up as follows:

> General assemblies of the monks constituted the sovereign authority and the procedure of its meeting was laid down with minute exactness. In the first place, all the fully ordained bhikkhus in a community were members of the assembly. Every one of them, unless incapacitated for some offence by way of penalty, had a right to vote. No meeting was legal unless all the members entitled to vote were either present, or being absent, formally declared their consent. A minimum number of members that must be present in order that the act may be legal or in other words the rules of the quorum are laid down in the *Mahavagga*. The assembly

having duly met, the mover had to first announce to the assembled bhikkhus the resolution he was going to propose.[58]

This procedure implies that the assembly had a complex structure. A list of those who were eligible members and those who committed offences was maintained. There used to be clerks or Recorders of the house, who without ever quitting their seats took down the minutes of the deliberations and resolutions. A Buddhist *Suttanta*, the *Maha Govinda*, describes a meeting of the Buddhists in their hall, the Sudhamma Sabha (The Hall of Good Law). At the four angles, just outside the rows of the celestial members of the assembly and in front of the spectators, four recorders, each with the title of *maharaja*, take their assigned seats. They are the receivers of resolutions.[59] We are not sure whether the minutes were set down in writing, as script suitable for this kind of note-taking was not known during the period, and it is likely that this was only an oral record. Moreover, some of the Buddhist bhikkhus were known for their abilities of memory.[60]

Rhys Davids points out that acts of indemnity and other acts and laws passed must have been captured in writing. He says, 'We know that elaborate records of judicial business were kept by the Licchavis. The large body of the republican ganas necessitated the presence of more than one clerk, the members of the assembly made speeches from their seats and the clerks near the section took down the words.'[61] This opinion contradicts the evidence that at the time of Buddha script had not developed to the stage of writing.

As with many human institutions, the Buddhist sangha also faced innumerable problem, and the *Chullavagga* deals with several of these in detail. One of the difficult aspects of administration was maintenance of the viharas (living places or monasteries). Buddha laid down rules on every aspect of vihara life, even the arrangement of furniture, how to treat the sick and the old, how to distribute goods and materials, how to resolve internal disputes and so on. The *Chullavagga* recounts how once some bhikkhus forced some sick bhikkhus to stand up, presumably in the assembly, in spite of their protests. The case was referred to Buddha, who declared, 'A sick man, O bhikkhus, is not to be made to get

up. Whosoever does so shall be guilty of *dukkata* [violation of the rule].' To make vihara decorum clear to inexperienced bhikkhus, Buddha enjoined them to take off their sandals and arrange their upper robes before entering, to put their bowls aside and take their places, to shut doors and windows against snakes and wild animals, and so on. He also outlined how to use water, clean the viharas and make the beds.[62] It is clear from this thorough formulation that Buddha wanted to create a model for the rest of society. Of course, the bhikkhus were issued strict orders not to misbehave with women whether within the sangha or outside: on the necessity of celibacy he was very rigid.[63] This is one aspect of Buddha's ideal life that can be criticized. He was imposing an unnatural life on the bhikkhus, and one, moreover, that would result in the self-limiting end of his system within a generation.[64]

Comparison with Hindu Institutions

It is important to compare the democratic and administrative systems of the Buddhists with contemporary Hindu institutions. Jayaswal in chapter 11 of his *Hindu Polity*, which he titles 'Procedure of Deliberation in Hindu Republics', quotes only Buddhist sources to prove that there was democratic practice in ancient India. In conclusion he says, 'Unlike the normal Hindu ascetic Buddha would hold property for his sanghas, he would hold meetings and pass resolutions and punish offenders . . . his system is a constitutionalised spiritual propaganda.'[65] Jayaswal's tacit appropriation of the practice of the Buddhist sangha as 'Hindu' is suspect. Even if we grant that Buddha was an ascetic, in many important respects he differed from Hindu sadhus, who lived a totally withdrawn life dedicated to individual meditation. The Hindu sadhu never believed in establishing institutions as Buddha did.

Perhaps the only institutions that appear to be similar to Buddhist ones were the post-Vedic Hindu schools called *gurukulas*, which were outside the state, but dependent on its patronage. But when we compare the sanghas with gurukulas there are many differences. The gurukulas were only teaching institutions, and were hierarchical. There was no admission for Sudras, and even the admissible Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya students were

unequal within the institution, in which there was no concept of meeting and passing universal laws. The guru's word was final. Thus the management of the sangha was completely different from the gurukula administration.[66]

As we have seen, the vidhata, sabha and samiti were basically tribal institutions which Buddha emulated.[67] But the claim that they were also Hindu institutions is ahistorical. In fact a study of the Vedic sacrifices, rituals, and yajnas that were being introduced at this time show that tribal oligarchies were under threat. For example, the purpose of the rajasuya yajna in essence was to establish by ritual one man's right to rule over the tribal folk. In fact, yajnas were nothing but declarations of one man's suzerainty over a region. In the *vajapeya* sacrifice a Brahmin was declared chief priest and a Kshatriya awarded universal sovereignty.[68] It is important to note that the Hindu state's embryonic form is the Hindu family and caste. The Hindu state drew its strength from rigid caste divisions, and yajnas were meant to institutionalize these structures. As we have discussed earlier, the Buddhist sangha was aimed at creating an equalitarian system, and such hierarchies and sovereign positions cannot be found in it.[69] The assertion that 'Kautilya was the interpreter par-excellence of neo-Aryanism against the nihilist philosophy of Buddhism' is the Hindu chauvinist position. By no stretch of the imagination can Buddhism be called nihilist.[70]

Ambedkar's comment in the Constituent Assembly of India about the Buddhist institutions comes as a total contrast to the opinions of these Hindu scholars. He said,

> 'It is not that India did not know parliaments or parliamentary procedure. A study of the Buddhist bhikkhu sanghas discloses that not only were there parliaments, for the sanghas were nothing but parliaments—but the sanghas knew and observed all the rules of parliamentary procedure known to modern times. They had rules regarding seating arrangements, rules regarding motions, resolutions, quorum, whip, counting of votes, voting by ballot, censure motions, regularization, adjudication, etc. Although these rules of parliamentary procedure were applied by Buddha to the meetings of the bhikkhu sanghas, the essence of

> Buddhism lies in working practically for one's freedom—economic, social and political. Buddha was the torchbearer of democracy and an ardent exponent of liberty, equality and fraternity.'[71]

What Ambedkar said may appear exaggerated in the light of Buddha's contemporary practice, but all institutions should be judged in the conditions and time they worked in.

Comparison with Ancient Western Philosophers

There is a striking similarity between Buddha and Socrates in their adopting the method of dialogue to reach a point, which both of them called the truth. Like Buddha, Socrates also 'devoting himself to an unrelenting search for truth, adopted a unique mode of procedure. Wandering about the city in company of a group of friends and disciples upon whose bounty he probably depended for a living, he would encounter someone who could be drawn into a discussion.'[72] Both Buddha and Socrates attempted to win people over with their moral arguments, but while Buddha established the sangha so that the body of people won over to his side was given a structural shape, Socrates was content merely to enlighten individuals. Nevertheless, there is a striking similarity in their perception of the essentials of democracy. Socrates's version was a system in which all the people were eligible to vote, just as in the sangha all could vote irrespective of caste, creed or colour.

Socrates was trying to rectify the maladies of the Athenian democratic system whereas Buddha was attempting to demonstrate an alternative to the emerging imperial state. The Hindu state system was in no way comparable to Athenian democratic states, in which a semblance of democracy functioned through the Senate and related institutions. The Hindu system, on the other hand, was becoming ever more centralized with the Kshatriya king as political and the Brahmin priest as spiritual head. Socrates attributed the evils of the Athenian system to the corrupt morals of his countrymen and to their arrogance that encouraged laxity. Buddha, by contrast, saw the systematic subjugation, annihilation and destruction of tribal democratic institutions by corrupt, am-

bitious Kshatriya rulers aided by the brahminical priestly class whose aim was to establish the supremacy of dandaniti, a system which put the Sudras in perpetual bondage. He also saw that the equalitarian system was degenerating into slavery, destitution and poverty. He wanted to attack this degradation and prove that democracy could still survive, and justice and equality prevail. If Socrates said, 'ar. aversion to injustice is justice,' the Buddha said, 'equality is dhamma'.[73] Because of his experience in institution-building and the fact that his concepts were being tested in practice the Buddhist perception of democracy appears to be have been far clearer than Socrates'. Buddha was communicating in the common man's tongue, much simpler than the language Socrates was using to communicate with his disciples.[74] This is the reason why Buddha could mobilize enormous strength and build a system during his lifetime.

There seem to be striking dissimilarities between Buddha and Plato. In Plato's opinion, democracy is distinguished by a general deterioration in moral standards due to the prevalence of false opinions characteristic of mob rule. Since he was basically a supporter of slavery he remained an opponent of democracy. Democracy, according to Plato, is subverted by straight freedom and passes into what is its continuation and opposite—tyranny. Excessive freedom turns into excessive slavery.[75] Buddha seems to have thought that freedom alone is sufficient to liberate human beings from all kinds of shackles. Perhaps like Marx he thought that in negating the freedom of others the negator also suffers from a lack of freedom. The liberation of one individual from misery and pain frees both the oppressor and the oppressed. Hence his concept of dhamma revolves round the granting and experiencing of freedom. This idea of freedom comes out very clearly when Buddha engages himself in discussions with his disciples. Freedom for him is not an abstract thing, but a practical necessity which can be experienced here and now. According to Buddha, 'the spoken word should neither be received with praise nor treated with scorn . . . every word and syllable should carefully be understood and be compared with the rules of the order.'[76] In this respect Buddha was a down-to-earth thinker.

Plato, on the other hand, was an idealist uninterested in the practice of his time. For him everything 'ought to be' whereas for

Buddha everything 'has to be'. Plato apparently echoes Buddha when he says justice is 'giving to every man his due',[77] but in conceptualizing his dhamma Buddha projects that 'each man should take his own due'. He stresses individual assertion, whereas Plato favours compassionate distributional justice by the state. In other words Buddha tells the individual it is his right to demand what is due him from the state whereas Plato places the individual at the state's mercy.

Some Orientalists like Edward Johns Urwick felt that Plato has something in common with Vedantism and his *Republic* is a result of the religious idealism that is present in the Vedas.[78] Unlike Plato, though he also used the dialogue method, Buddha is more materialist and a practical man. For Buddha democracy and democratic culture are pivotal questions whereas for Plato efficiency is pivotal.[79] For the sake of efficiency Plato is willing to sacrifice democracy, while Buddha is willing to compromise efficiency for the sake of democracy and freedom. Thus one established a democratic sangha society and the other idealized the rule of a philosopher king.

It is very difficult to compare Buddha and Aristotle because they have travelled in two different directions. While Buddha opposes slavery as a form of exploitation Aristotle treats it as a natural part of human existence.[80] For Buddha democracy was the best form, whereas for Aristotle democracy is a corrupt form of 'polity'. According to Nersesyants, 'polity itself is conceived by Aristotle as a mixture of oligarchy and democracy, and the principle of alliance of wealth and freedom which obtains in most other constitutions is in fact of the State in general as the framework of political partnership.'[81] When compared to the Aristotelian state the Buddhist sangha is not only smaller but also does not represent an alliance of 'wealth and freedom'. It symbolizes only freedom but not wealth. Many Hindu thinkers claimed that Aristotle was closer to Kautilya. Somnath Dhar, a specialist in Kautilya, claims that 'like Aristotle, Kautilya realized that the State held together under the aegis of strong government could be not only a great civilizer but an agency that could shake the slumbering somnolent society.' Of course, Dhar accepts that Buddhism was upholding the freedom of the individual in thought and action while Hinduism was opting for supremacy of spirit

over matter.[82] According to him, Kautilya harmonized both these schools of thought. The efforts of these scholars are intended to free Kautilya from the Eurocentric label of ancient Machiavellian; hence they chose Aristotle as antithesis.

On the question of justice there is a striking similarity between Buddha and Aristotle. Aristotle divides justice into two components: (*i*) distributive justice and (*ii*) corrective justice. Distributive justice stresses the role of the state; corrective justice promotes equality in the exchange of goods in accordance with the amount and quality of labour contained therein.[83] Buddha's stress on the individual's right to take what is due him is definitely closer to Aristotle's corrective justice. However, Buddha's concepts of justice and democracy are more relevant to our situation than those of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

NOTES

1. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 467.
2. There were attempts to draw parallels between the Hindu and the Buddhist approach to political systems but the different streams of thought diverged quite distinctly. The essential drive of Kautilya's *Arthasastra* and Manu's *Dharmasastra* is towards centralization whereas the Buddhist drive is towards equality and liberty.
3. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 467.
4. Rousseau and Voltaire were representatives of the emerging capitalist class and their theories of liberty, equality and fraternity upheld the representative freedom of liberal parliamentary democracy. See Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay's *Western Political Thought from Plato to Marx* (Calcutta: K.P.Bagchi, 1980), pp. 139-157.
5. See Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Translator, Colonialism and the Rise of English'. *Economic and Political Weekly* (14 April 1990), where she quotes William Jones who writes 'like the deluded misbegotten Indians, among whom I live, who would receive liberty as a curse instead of blessing.'
6. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 5.
7. Professor Heinrich Zimmer, while discussing the concept of danda or the rod as corrective, says that the danda symbolized justice. He used the term 'dharma' to mean the fixed order of heaven and earth. See Saletore, p. 11.

8. In all linguistic regions of modern India, the concept 'dharma' is used in day-to-day speech to mean justice. More or less all languages use the word with the same meaning, while 'danda' is used to mean punishment. The common peoples' usage of certain words is a great record of history. It should be noted here that when the first 'd' is pronounced hard, as in 'dog', 'danda' means 'rod' but when it is soft (as in 'the') 'danda' means 'punishment. The second 'd' is hard in both cases.
9. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 50.
10. Ibid., p. 197.
11. Saletore, *Political Thought*, p. 67
12. Saletore translates this statement of Kautilya's and in order to vouch for its accuracy he provides the Sanskrit text in brackets. *Political Thought*, p. 67.
13. Sharma, *Aspects*, pp. 179-180.
14. For details see Ambedkar, 'Untouchables, Who Were They? and Why They Became Untouchables?' *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 7, 1990.
15. In the ancient Indian context the instrument of danda is nothing but the police. As law enforcing institutions (including the standing army) were increasing in order to strengthen the state and to contain the revolts against Brahmins and Kshatriyas expressed in transgressions of caste law, the emphasis on danda also increased.
16. Saletore, *Political Thought*, p. 24.
17. Dhar, *Kautilya*, p. 79.
18. 'Setting in motion onwards of the royal chariot wheel of the supreme dominion of the dharma' (which Ashoka adopted as his symbol) means the inauguration or foundation of the kingdom of righteousness. See *Dhamma Chakka Ppavattana Sutta*, translated by Rhys Davids, SBE vol. 11, p. 140, Rhys Davids clarifies what this means in his introduction.
19. Ambedkar, *Buddha and his Dhamma* (Mumbai: Siddhartha, 1984), p. 226-7.
20. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 34.
21. *Nibbana* means salvation of the soul. It can be conceived in four ways, (*i*) *Lokik*, (*ii*) *Yogic*, (*iii*) *Brahminic*, and (*iv*) *Upanishadic*. Buddha rejects all of them and defines it to mean exercise of control over the flames of the passions. See Ambedkar, *Buddha and His Dharma*, p. 164.
22. Ibid., pp. 160-172, 174-186.
23. Physical force and violence were used not only by the state to maintain

the four-fold varna system but by other social agencies as well. Educational institutions poured molten lead into the ears of Sudras if they sought admission into schools. Sometimes tongues were also cut out.

24. See the entire discussion between Buddha and Sunakkahutta in Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, p.226.
25. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 69.
26. See Plato, *The Republic*, trans GMA Grube (London: Pan, 1974), pp. 33-62.
27. D.C. Ahir, *Dr Ambedkar on Buddhism* (Siddhartha, 1982), p. 71.
28. Though Romila Thapar defines it as an institution identified by the name of common ancestors, she recognizes the fact that it is a political structure. See *From Lineage to State*, p. 55.
29. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 69.
30. Quoted in Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 19.
31. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 103.
32. See Bennett's Introduction to *Digha Nikaya, Long Discourses of the Buddha* trans A. A. J. Bennett (Mumbai: Chetana, n.d.) p.11.
33. See Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 28. It is important to note the footnote he gives on this page, in which he clarifies that the sanghas were basically political institutions as Panini does not know them as religious but only as political entities.
34. See P.V. Bapat, ed., *2500 Years of Buddhism* (Government of India, 1987), pp. 35-55.
35. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 28.
36. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 483.
37. Earlier we have discussed how one of the reasons for Buddha's disappointment with the political situation of his day was the systematic destruction of tribal democratic systems. The emergence of Bimbisara's imperial state is a result of this massive destruction, see chapter 3.
38. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, pp. 484-486. The main source for the details of this study is the *Vinaya Pitaka*.
39. Rockhill in his translation comments that it appears improbable that they had any regulations in their dress. He notes that according to the *Dulva* the bhikkhus were prohibited from wearing the sacred cord of the *Dvijas*, or twice born (upper) castes. They were also prohibited from drawing ritual lines in white clay on their persons. See *Life of the Buddha*, p. 50. 'Pabbajja' (Sanskrit 'pravrajya') means 'going forth,'

i.e., out of ordinary society, while 'upasampada' (same in Sanskrit) means 'coming in', in other words, entering the sangha. In the early days of Buddhism these two rituals probably took place together, but later it became the practice to interpolate a trial period of a few years before the first and second. It was also ruled that upasampada could be undergone only by someone above 20 years of age.

40. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 487.
41. For details see Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 50.
42. The translation from the *Vinaya Pitaka* is taken from Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 488. Though Chattopadhyaya quoted this passage from the *Vinaya Pitaka*, it is also available in the first 'khandaka' of the *Mahavagga*. Rhys Davids and Oldenberg in their footnote to the SBE edition mentioned that there are 'different successive forms in which the ordination of bhikkhus had been performed. In the beginning, of course, there was nobody but Buddha himself who could ordain bhikkhus'. As the sangha grew larger, Buddha delegated the power of admitting new members to the bhikkhu sangha by instituting the democratic form of ordination. See SBE, vol. 13, pp. 73-239.
43. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 56. Upali was perhaps the first person from a 'low' community to be admitted into the sangha. Of course, later many were admitted.
44. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 488.
45. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 88.
46. Jayaswal gives two other examples where Maha Kassapa and Upali moved resolutions in the first Congress that was held at Rajagriha after the death of Buddha.
47. SBE, vol. 12, refers to a *goma puraka* who acted as the whip. This is translated by Rhys Davids and Oldenberg and quoted by Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 89.
48. SBE, vol. 17, p. 266.
49. SBE, vol. 20, p. 266; Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 21.
50. *Chullavagga*, vol. 4, 4-19, 4-20. Quoted in Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, pp. 92-93. 'Pachittiya' was the worst form of offence requiring fall confession and atonement before the sangha.
51. SBE, vol. 17, p. 265, quoted in Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 491.
52. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 97.
53. Hindu practice by then was that women were prohibited from attending religious functions. Of course, they had no role in political affairs. Buddha sincerely believed that women would pollute the

sangha. This kind of patriarchal prejudice was very prevalent in Hindu society, and Buddha shared it. See Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, pp. 60-61. Also see P. Thomas, *Women Through the Ages* (Mumbai: Asia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 82-88.

54. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 88.
55. For details see the *Chullavagga*, vols. 4-12.
56. Rockhill, *Hindu Polity*, pp. 52, 56, 86-88.
57. For details see the *Chullavagga*, Vols., 4-22.
58. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 489. For details see R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life.*
59. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 94. For details see SBE, vol. 10, Vinaya Texts, part 3.
60. Ikeda, *Buddhisim*, p. 35.
61. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha* Part 2. SBE, vol. 3, pp. 263-264.
62. *Chullavagga*, vol. 20, pp. 199-200, 272-279.
63. *Vinaya Pitaka* lays down that 'whether bhikkhus, being degraced, shall with perverted mind, come into bodily contract with a woman by taking hold of her hand, or by taking hold of her hair, or by touching any part of her body, that is, sanghadisesa.' See *Mahavagga*, SBE, vol. 13, Vinaya Texts, p. 7.
64. One of the major criticisms against the sangha is that by advocating celibacy it neglected the human urge to procreate. If the sangha is to be taken as the model institution what of the continuation of humanity? Plato in his *Republic* provided, within the communal life of the ruling class, the scope for selective mating.
65. See Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, pp. 8-87. In this entire chapter there is not a single quotation from any Hindu thinker including Kautilya and Manu. Also see p. 97.
66. The story of Ekalavya and Drona is well known. Ekalavya, a tribal, sought admission into the gurukula of Drona, but was refused according to caste laws. Ekalavya then taught himself in secret before an image of Drona. When he found out, Drona took Ekalavya's thumb as his fee for the use of the image, thus disabling the boy and rendering his skills useless.
67. See Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 488, where he says that the essential character of the Buddhist sangha as a tribal legacy was never lost.
68. Sharma, *Aspects*, pp. 54, 151.
69. Buddha was the unchallenged leader of the sangha as long as he was alive. After his death Maha Kassapa, Upali and Ananda constituted

a small collective leadership, but they declared that the sangha was guided by philosophy rather than individuals.

70. See Somnath Dhar, *Kautilya and the Arthasastra*, p.101, in which Buddhism is called Nihilism and Anarchism. The term 'nihilism' is used in a negative sense.
71. See *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. 11, Speech on 26.11.1949 wherein Ambedkar traces the parliamentary tradition in India to Buddhist practice.
72. Maxey, *Political Philosophies*, 2nd ed, 1948.
73. Nersesyants, *Ancient Greece*, p. 99. The author quotes extensively from Xenophon's *Memorable Thoughts of Socrates*. Also see p. 17.
74. If Plato's *Republic* is an indication, Socrates's arguments were abstract. Socrates's debates were confined to the intellectuals of his period; in fact he is said to have transformed the civic ethic from a democratic into an aristocratic idea. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why there was no mass protest when Socrates was forced to take poison. See Wood and Wood, *Class, Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*, p. 79.
75. Plato, *Republic*, p. 565, Quoted in Nersesyants, *Ancient Greece*, pp. 118-119.
76. *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*, SBE, vol. 11, p. 67.
77. Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, p. 65. Also see Plato, *Republic*, pp. 15-20.
78. Pandarinath H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organisation: A Study in Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundations* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1995) p. 71.
79. Plato, *Republic*, p. 162.
80. Mukhopadhyaya, *Western Political Thought*, p. 40.
81. Nersesyants, *Ancient Greece*, p. 155.
82. Dhar, *Kautilya*, p. 103.
83. Nersesyants, *Ancient Greece*, p. 149, 158.

6

Property, Rights and Duties

NOT MANY COMMENTATORS have discussed Buddha's understanding of property and the rights and duties of citizens. In order to understand Buddha's political ideology it is important to discuss his perspective on property as an institution and the rights and duties of the members of the sangha on the one hand and of the entire society on the other. For the institution of property is the basic structure that moulds the social behaviour of members. Broadly speaking property is divided into two types: that in the form of land and industry and that in the form of houses and other essentials that are used for human consumption.[1]

A concrete understanding of rights and duties becomes possible only when we study them in relation to the institution of property. But we are of the opinion that superstructural institutions have a lot of scope to operate independently of the base, influencing the people's consciousness which in turn moulds the base.[2] In India this happened time and again because of the strong tradition established by the ideological manoeuvres of Brahminism which built a strong superstructure that could control the base and uphold almost a perpetual hegemony. It appears that Buddha was the first person to throw a challenge to this hegemony over the idea of property by giving the sangha a property system of its own. Property was acquired and distributed in accordance with the principles of the sangha's democratic system. The laws regarding sangha property were passed in accordance with dhamma. The members of the sangha had to follow a code of conduct not only with regard to their personal behaviour but with regard to the property of the viharas as well. It was clearly laid down in the *Dhammapada* what the rights of the

sangha members were and what duties they were supposed to perform.

There is a remarkable statement by Buddha in the *Vinaya Pitaka* (*Dulva*) which sums up his world-view. He says, 'In this very life they [the people] will come to an end, decay, die and come not forth again after death.'[3] With one statement Buddha declares that the concept of heavenly pleasures accruing at the cost of earthly life is a myth.[4] Therefore according to him life should be made worth living here.[5] And after death: human beings turn into matter again. Buddha says, 'The body of man is composed of the four great elements, and when he dies the earthy part of his body returns to earth, the watery part to water, the fiery part to the fire, and the airy part to the air. The perceptive powers are scattered in space. The corpse is carried by men to the cemetery and burnt. The burnt remains become ashes, and the bones become the colour of wood pigeons.'[6] But while the body is functioning, like the parts of a machine, it needs the necessary oil to keep it going, hence human beings need food. As Karl Marx put it, 'human beings are the real individuals, their activity and the material condition under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can, thus, be verified in a purely empirical way.'[7] As a materialist of the ancient period Buddha established the sangha which functioned on a human plane and was available for empirical verification; however, he was not materialist in the strict Marxian sense. It is not possible to compare Buddha with Marx in entirety because the conditions in which they lived were different, hence one reflected an under-developed agrarian economy and the other an advanced capitalist one. But what is common to them both is the materialist world outlook.[8]

The *Upanishads* which were already current by the time of Buddha show a marked tendency to establish the primacy of the spirit by proving the unreality or illusory character of the materialist world.[9] In fact, Buddha's materialism was the antithesis of Upanishadic spiritualism and brutalized monarchical states. In actuality brahminical ascetics were in command of all the monarchical states. The *kamandala*, in actual fact, was under the total command of the *mandala*, and the rishi was controlling the king. Buddha in this situation chose the 'Middle Path' between two

extremes, (*a*) unrestrained individualistic self-indulgence and (*b*) equally individualistic but preposterous ascetic punishment of the body. This was at the root of the success of his philosophy and of its name 'the Middle Way.'[10] Buddha's individualism was that of the assertion of individual rights against the emerging monarchical state.[11]

On the Division of Labour

The Buddhist concepts of property and the rights of individuals also need to be examined in the context of his understanding of the division of labour. Buddha put his explanation of this in a very crude form but one can see through his argument. He said,

> 'Then it happened that some persons not having been able to find perfection in meditation and perfect seclusion went to a certain place, where they made huts with boughs and leaves. "Here," they said, "We will compose mantras, we will compile Vedas."
> 'Some others, not having been able to find perfection in composing mantras and in compiling Vedas, left the wilds and went back to their villages. "Here," they said, "we will distribute alms and do good works."

These people in essence were agriculturists. According to Buddha, 'those who lived away from villages were called "detached minds" or Brahmanas. Some were not given to contemplation, but did read. They were called the *pathakas* [readers]. Those who lived away from forests and in villages are called villagers.' Finally Buddha says, 'Some applying themselves to different handicrafts and occupation in their homes made different kind of things [which they did sell] and they were, therefore, called 'merchants' or Vaisyas.'

Of Kshatriyas Buddha always spoke very highly; in his opinion the Kshatriyas ranked first. According to him there were two types of Kshatriyas—those who took up sangha life, and those who continued to wield state power, with the former regarded as higher beings. In his own words, 'members of Kshatriya families cut off their hair and beard, they left their homes for the homeless

state [communal life] and to them the Kshatriyas [rulers] spoke with respect , the Brahmins; Vaisyas treated them with respect.'[12] Next was the place of Brahmins reading mantras and composing the Vedas. The Vaisyas were cottage industrialists and commodity sellers. Of course there is no specific mention of the Sudras, only of villagers who did various work. In this paradigm there is no allusion to exploitation but at the end of the story there is a reference to stealing. And finally he sums up, 'By this act, by stealing, sin now exists in the world, in which there was no trace of it in the first place.'[13]

His conclusion gives us a clue that his ideal division of labour is an ideal division of functions. And according to him once stealing has started the ideal division of labour degenerates into exploitation.[14] Productive work did not find a very respectable place in the division of labour because, as D. D. Kosambi rightly points out, 'the early monks, like the Buddha himself, were expert food gatherers, as is evident from their recorded arguments about begging soiled food from other human beings; long trips through the wilderness did not trouble them . . . the Buddhist monk was forbidden labour for profit and for agriculture, having to live on alms or by gathering food in the forest without taking life; only thus would he be free to concentrate upon his social duties, the obligation to lead all to the proper way.'[15]

By the time of Buddha the division of labour had struck deep roots, giving rise to different occupational groups. For example, Ajatasatru, king of Magadha, asks Buddha, 'My Lord, there are many kinds of trades and professions such as wreath-makers, basket-makers, weavers, grass-gatherers, trainers, elephant-riders, horsemen, chariot-drivers, swordsmen, body-servants, scribes, dancers, rajaputras, warlike and valorous, jesters, barbers and bathers [*sic*]. Any one of these exercising his trade or profession gives in charity, does good, tends the sick; he acquires the five kinds of desirable things . . .'[16] This description indicates that society was divided into special groups. Only the few occupational groups mentioned here were known to Ajatasatru but society was subsequently divided into many more productive occupational groups like slaves, potters, goldsmiths, sheep-breeders and so on, which were converted by the ruling class (the Brahmins and Kshatriyas) into castes. Buddha's attitude seems to

be that they should be treated as respectable productive occupational groups, but not as castes.[17]

On Property

The Buddhist understanding of property has hitherto not been discussed much. Perhaps Buddha's was the time when the most diverse stands were being taken by contemporary thinkers on the question of property. While ascetic Brahminism was talking of relinquishing property the priestly and ministerial Brahmins and Kshatriyas were arguing for a centralized state with state ownership of land. The *Brahmanas* and the *Arthashastra* give enough evidence for the accumulation of vast quantities of landed property by the state. According to Kosambi, the Kautilyan state was the main land-clearing agency, by far the greatest landowner, the principal owner of heavy industry and even the greatest producer of commodities. Janapada land fell into two distinct categories: those paying *bastra* taxes; and the *sita* lands settled as well as farmed directly under crown supervision. Kosambi felt that both Buddha and Mahavira lived in a period of *rashtra* or tribal landholding, while their followers were barred from crown land within just two centuries before Ashoka, when the system of direct exploitation by the state reached its vigorous peak. In fact, by Bimbisara's time the state had come to control the major portion of crown land, and was parcelling out small patches of land to private cultivators also.

The Jain and Buddhist schools represented a different perspective, apparently arguing for continuing the communal ownership of land. Buddha was opposed not just to landownership by the tax-exacting state but even to that by individuals. By then rulers were using brutal methods to impose heavy taxes on poor people. According to Kosambi, Buddha ventured to propound new duties for the absolute monarch. The king who merely collected taxes from landowners, leaving them to be troubled by brigands and anti-social elements, was not doing his duty.[18]

Buddha was also opposed to ownership of landed property by the sangha.[19] Under extreme circumstances the sangha seem to have cultivated small patches of land for survival, as the *Mahavagga* mentions the occasional sowing of seeds in the land

belonging to the *aramas* or monastaries, but in normal conditions the sangha never maintained landed property. Oldenberg categorically says, 'Gautama refrained from receiving arable land from anybody.' He adds, 'Lands, slaves, horses and livestock, the order did not possess and was not allowed to accept. It did not engage in agricultural pursuits, nor did it permit them to be carried out on its account.'[20] But the bhikkhus were not denied the possession of some personal goods necessary for life. Property useful in the propagation of Buddhist ideology was also allowed. In other words, in sangha life Buddha thought some non-productive property was unavoidable.[21]

Kosambi says, 'The monk was permitted no property beyond a begging bowl, a water pot, at most three pieces of plain unembroidered patternless cloth for wear, oil jug, razor, needle and thread, and staff. The more delicate [bhikkhus] were allowed plain sandals and so on.'[22] There was a big network of viharas, with a commensurate administrative system. The nature of the property the sangha owned can be understood only if we examine the *Mahavagga* carefully.

The *Mahavagga* lays down certain rules or limitations on acquiring non-productive properties. In the business of living a bhikkhu could put up a hut, either temporarily or permanently, which should be 'twelve spans in length and seven spans in breadth. But the site where the bhikkhu wants to put up the hut has to be placed [*sic*] before the sangha and the sangha shall have to approve it. The sanghas preferred sites with open space.' Owning large residences was not expressly prohibited but these were to be used strictly as the common property of the sangha. Rhys Davids and Oldenberg say that 'large houses were those around which a yoke of oxen would be able to pass'.[23] To quote from the *Mahavagga*, 'A bhikkhu having a large residence shall bring the bhikkhus to the place to approve the site; and those bhikkhus shall approve a site free from danger, and with an open space around it.'[24] Apart from these huts and residences Buddha himself accepted from the kings of his period several viharas as gifts and the vihara property was regarded as communal. According to Rhys Davids and Oldenberg, while framing the rules to regulate sangha property the later Buddhist sanghas depended in great measure upon the communistic customs of the ancient fraternity.[25] The viharas by and large

were places where one person could live but there were some that could accommodate up to seventeen, and some had space for guests also.[26] In the early stages of sangha life bhikkhus used to live in the forests, beneath trees, on hillsides, in mountain caves and so on. On seeing this the sethi of Rajagaha offered them dwellings, and the bhikkhus in turn asked Buddha whether they could accept the gift. In the discussion in the *Chullavagga* Buddha tells them, 'I allow you, O bhikkhus, abodes of five kinds, viharas, *addhayogas*, storied dwellings, attics and caves.' When the sethi was told this he was happy, constructed sixty dwelling places and donated them to the sangha on a particular day, offering them a meal too. But in the beginning the viharas were without doors and hence snakes, scorpions and centipedes got in. Buddha then allowed them to have doors, doorposts and lintels. Later on he allowed windows.[27]

There are two important references that indicate Buddha also accepted bigger gifts from kings and that these were considered sangha property.

Bimbisara offered his Veluvana garden to Buddha as a gift, as at that time the sangha had no proper vihara to live in. The Veluvana garden was conveniently located, neither too far from the town nor too near. Buddha not only accepted the arama park, he made it a rule that such gifts of land were lawful.[28] However, collection of gold and silver was strictly prohibited. If any bhikkhu breached this rule and acquired gold or silver, the sangha would exchange it for ghee, oil and other necessaries to be distributed among the members.[29] If this proved impracticable 'then as a last resort, some bhikkhu is to be formally appointed "bullion remover" and he is to go and throw it away somewhere without making any mark at the place'.[30] Oldenberg describes this process as follows: 'When the guilty monk has penitently confessed his transgression before the assembled monks, if one of the laity attached to the order be in the neighborhood, the gold is given to him, with these words, "Friend, take this into thy keeping." Such a person should have 'five qualities: who is free from desire, free from hate, free from infatuation, free from fear and who knows what casting away means.' If this person with the permission of the assembled monks 'purchases for the monks what they are permitted to receive—butter, oil or ghee or honey, this they all

enjoy.' Or in case they decide to throw it away he has to take care that the place where it lies may not be recognizable by any sign. If he makes a sign, he is liable to be punished.[31]

The disposal of sangha property was strictly prohibited. One day on receiving a complaint the Blessed One asked the bhikkhus, 'Is it true, O bhikkhus, as they say, that bhikkhus make away with sangha property? 'It is true, Lord,'said the complainers; then the Blessed One rebuked them and said to the bhikkhus, 'These five things, O bhikkhus, are untransferable, and are not to be disposed off either by the sangha, or by a company of two or three bhikkhus [gana] or by a single individual.' The five things were: (*i*) a park (arama) or the site for the park, (*ii*) a vihara or the site for a vihara, (*iii*) a bed or a chair, or bolster, or a pillow, (*iv*) a brass vessel or a brass jar or a brass pot or a brass vase or a razor or a axe or hatchet or a hoe or a spade; and (*v*) creepers, or bamboos or *munga* or *babbaga* grass, or common grass or clay, or things made of wood, or crockery. Such disposal would be void, and whosoever disposed of them guilty of a *thullakkaya*.[32]

Another important contribution to sangha property was the robes, mats and rugs collected by its members. These materials first had to be accounted for to the sangha, which then redistributed them to the members based on their needs. For example, a sick or weak member and other such persons were allowed more clothes than the healthy ones.[33] But strict rules were made with regard to collection of alms from householders. Each individual bhikkhu was allowed two or three robes for personal use, and if anyone felt he needed special robes for unusual circumstances he had to take the sangha's permission.[34] Each bhikkhu was supposed to wash and clean his own robes, mats and so on. Using others' services—particularly those of the bhikkhunis—was treated as an offence, though there were exceptions; for example, if the bhikkhuni was related to the bhikkhu whose clothes she washed, it was permitted.[35]

The sangha property also included furniture such as bedsteads made of split bamboo, *masaraka* chairs, biers like *bundicas, kullara-padaka* and *ahakk-padaka* chairs and so on. Buddha said, 'I allow, O bhikkhus, a rectangular chair, an arm-chair, a sofa, sofa with arms to it, a cushioned chair raised on a pedestal, a chair with many legs, a cane bottomed chair, a straw chair.' Thus sangha property

was increasing but when several complaints reached Buddha that the viharas were becoming places of luxuries he made the laws rigid. For example, Buddha said, 'To sleep on lofty beds is *dukkata* [offence].' As time passed the sanghas started weaving cloth, and made rules to weave the strings into bedsteads. They also wove carpets for their use and converted cotton into pillows. The *Chullavagga* mentions three kinds of cotton that were available in those days—cotton from trees, from creepers and from *potaki* grass.

There is also evidence in the *Chullavagga* that the sleeping rooms were whitewashed, the floors were painted black and the walls coloured with red chalk. In order to see that the paint and whitewashing became stable the bhikkhus used to rub them with the husks of grain made up into little balls, and apply soft clay and other pastes. Once the viharas became crowded privacy became a problem and the sangha gradually allowed the use of curtains and lath and plaster partitions. Verandas were covered with terraces. The *Chullavagga* mentions that Buddha allowed roofing of five kinds to the viharas—of brick, stone, cement, straw and leaves.

It is not true to say that sangha members always depended on occasional alms; they often gathered and cooked fixed rations from patrons. Bhikkhus were appointed to regulate lodging places and apportion food. The appointment of Dabba Mallian as chief of this department is elaborately discussed in the fourth *Khandaka* of *Chullavagga*, where Dabba Mallian proposes to Buddha, "It would be a good thing for me to regulate the lodging places of the sanghas and to apportion the ration." The proposal was put before the sangha, which met in full and passed a resolution approving his appointment.[36]

All this goes to prove that the Buddhist sangha was not a place where there was no property at all, but it is true that there was a vast difference in the sangha's conceptualization of property and its use from that prevailing in the wider society. Sangha property was communal, not for individual ownership or inheritance but for the community's use.

We come across two types of analyses. One school describes Buddha as a thorough renouncer who was supposed to have starved his body and would not think of owning anything for himself. Even a very learned scholar like D. D. Kosambi also made

this mistake by stating that 'the monk was granted no property' ignoring the fact that communal property was permitted within the sangha.[37] The second school maintains that the Buddhist sangha system acquired property only as a consequence of its degeneration. This too is not correct. The idea of property not only existed from the beginning but its entire expression was well thought out. The sangha property developed as the sangha grew. Had this growth been a question of degeneration the bhikkhus would have acquired landed private property in Buddha's lifetime itself, but he never permitted this. This is where the Buddhist politics lie: Buddha was opposed to any form of private property. There is evidence to show that when Buddha was alive some viharas owned small patches of landed property, but it appears Buddha never allowed agricultural land to be owned by the sangha.

Though Chattopadhyaya tries to compare Buddha's experiment with primitive communism, even that is not a valid argument because the primitive communist society represented a completely underdeveloped stage of production and of human consciousness. Primitive communism existed much before the state could come into operation. The Buddhist sangha was a parallel experiment to the imperial state and burgeoning individual private property. As Chattopadhyaya rightly points out, 'At a critical stage of Indian history when the free tribes of the times were being ruthlessly exterminated within the orbits of the expanding state power, Buddha was modelling his sangha on the basic principles of the tribal society.' The tribal societies were not against property but they were against private individual ownership of it. Buddha was exactly the same.

On Human Rights

The Buddha's understanding of rights has to be examined both from the point of view of general society as from that of the members of the sangha. The very purpose of the establishment of the sangha was rooted in finding a solution to the misery caused by oppression. Whether it was the extermination of the Vajjians or Ajatasatru's systematic annihilation of the Licchavis which Chattopadhyaya rightly calls the 'ruthless extermination of his

own people, including women and children,' it was a result of the rulers' lack of respect for the Right to Life of the tribal masses.[38] There was no respect for life within the royal families. As Rockhill narrates, 'Ajatasatru had his father cast in prison, there to die of hunger.'[39] He did not even allow his mother to see her husband nor give him food. Buddha intervened and provided Ajatasatru's father Bimbisara food by some means, but the story did not end there. Ajatasatru was killed by his son Udayabhadda, who was killed by his son Anurudhhaka, who was killed by his son Munda, who was killed by his son Nagasasaka.[40] Thus the contemporary society of Buddha was steeped in destruction, murder and violence, and his basic concern was to establish some order and respect for the Right to Life.

His understanding of the Right to Life came out of his position of non-violence. While arguing with a Brahmin who was in favour of offering animals in sacrifice, Buddha tells him that one has to establish peace, prosperity and security in a kingdom.[41] He believed that there was a need to 'remove all injustice' from a system. Buddha also said, 'So long, Ananda, as the Vajjians foregather thus often and frequent the public meetings of their clan; so long may they be expected not to decline but prosper.'[42] This expression of Buddha shows two things: (*i*) he had enormous respect for life, because he thought that human beings by nature were good, and thus as much as possible life had to be respected and preserved, and (*ii*) he thought tribal democratic traditions were good enough to be preserved. While he was against violence, he was also in favour of justice and in order to establish a just society if required he permitted the use of force. According to Ambedkar, this is well illustrated in his dialogue with Sinha Senapati, the commander-in-chief of Vesali. Sinha Senapati asks Buddha,

> 'The Tathagatha preaches ahimsa. Does the Tathagatha preach that an offender be given freedom from punishment? Does the Tathagatha preach that we should not go to save our wives, our children, should we suffer at the hands of criminals, in the name of ahimsa? Does the Tathagatha prohibit war even when it is in the interest of Truth and Justice?'

Buddha replied,

> 'You have wrongly understood what I have been preaching. An offender must be punished and an innocent man must be freed. It is not a fault of the Magistrate if he punishes an offender. The cause of punishment is the fault of the offender. If all the means of maintaining peace have failed then the responsibility for himsa falls on him who starts war. One must never surrender to evil powers. War there may be. But it must not be for selfish ends.'

Based on this discussion, Ambedkar concludes that the Buddha's ahimsa was not as absolute as that preached by Mahavira. He further says, 'As to dictatorship the Buddha would have none of it. He was born a democrat and he died a democrat.'[43]

In conformity with the principle of Right to Life the sangha passed the following laws: no bhikkhu shall knowingly deprive a human being of life, no bhikkhu shall set an assassin against a human being, no bhikkhu shall utter praises of death or incite to self-destruction (suicide). The penalty for any of these was expulsion.

Unlike the Vedic thinkers, Buddha granted the rights to life and to free association to all human beings irrespective of sex, caste and creed.[44] Before being admitted into the sangha Upali is said to have thought, 'If I had not an evil birth, I would have entered the order of the well-spoken dhamma, and would have devoted myself to crossing the stream and to freeing myself of all bounds.' Rockhill states that Upali was the first bhikkhu mentioned in the legends who did not belong to the Brahmin or Kshatriya castes. The *Vinaya Pitaka* says, 'The Blessed One told him, "Come here, bhikkhu, and lead a life of purity." Forthwith Upali's hair is said to have fallen out and he stood arrayed in bhikkhu's apparel.'[45] And, as has already been discussed, women were admitted after a debate in the sangha and the first to get admission was Maha Prajapati.[46] Admission into the Buddhist sangha in those days was treated as an unusual achievement. Buddha's opening of admission to all sexes, castes and creeds is a clear recognition of the people's right to free thought, expression and association.

Rights Within the Sangha

The sangha legal system lays down details of the rights and the duties of members in the settlement of disputes among the fraternity with regard to dwelling and furniture, behaviour of the bhikkhus with one another and so on. General principles are laid down recognizing the right to speech of individuals, of the majority and of the sangha as an association. According to canonical law, at times the individual may speak dhamma against many and against the sangha itself, at times the majority may express dhamma and at times the sangha as a whole reflects it. This expression of dhamma is like Rousseau's 'General Will', which according to Rousseau was neither the will of a majority, nor a minority.

For example, with regard to the rights of individuals in disputes there is an interesting case in the *Chullavagga*. After Dabba Mallian's appointment as regulator some bhikkhus became annoyed with him as he did not allot good dwellings, and punished bhikkhus who were coming late and not adhering to sangha rules. Then the followers of a bhikkhuni called Mettiya conspired against him, and planned that Mettiya should allege Mallian had raped her and hence he should be expelled. This was a doubly serious offence because sexual intercourse was totally prohibited. Mettiya Bhummagaka accordingly complained to Buddha, a sangha assembly was called and Buddha told Mallian, 'If you have done it say so, if you have not done it, say you have not.' Mallian replied, 'Since I was born, Lord, I cannot call to mind that I have practised sexual intercourse even in a dream, much less than when I was awake.' This he repeats thrice. Finally, it was proved that Mettiya had fabricated the accusation. 'Then those bhikkhus expelled the bhikkhuni Mettiya.' Interestingly the male bhikkhus later confessed that she was forced to allege rape, but in spite of their confession they were only rebuked, whereas Mettiya's expulsion was not overturned.

This story raises many questions but what is important for our purpose is that whenever there were complaints or cases against individuals in the sangha assemblies the right to explain his or her own version was fully granted to the accused. Evidence was checked and cross-checked before somebody was punished or expelled.

Sangha members were also restrained from harassing sick and insane persons. The story of the insane bhikkhu Gagga who was harassed by others gives a clear indication. When the case was taken to the assembly, the bhikkhus who had harassed him were rebuked. In the *Chullavagga* we come across several stories in which sangha members act judiciously and punish the guilty. This experience led the sangha to pass a major resolution, very important from the point of view of rights of members and sangha jurisprudence. The resolution was as follows: 'There are five things which make a grant of acquittal to those who are conscious of innocence, according to the law: (*i*) the bhikkhu must be innocent and without offence, (*ii*) others must have censured him, (*iii*) he must ask the sangha for acquittal as being conscious of innocence, (*iv*) the sangha must grant it, and (*v*) the sangha must be duly held and duly constituted. 'There, O bhikkhus, are five things which make a grant of the acquittal of those who are conscious of innocence to be according to law,' declares the Blessed One.[47] The legal guidelines indicate that if a person commits a crime and afterwards realizes that what he did was wrong and resolves that in future he would never repeat it, the sangha warns him and allows him to reform himself. And it takes maximum care in awarding punishments; the step is discussed from all angles in the presence of all the members in a duly constituted assembly. Buddha was very clear in his mind that the rights of the accused were as important as those of the accusers. But once guilt was proved the sangha did not hesitate to prescribe punishment suitable to the crime. As we have seen in the case of Mettiya, she had to face expulsion. The term *ukkepeniya-kamma* is used several times, meaning those who committed particular offences were not allowed to eat and live in the sangha.

Whether it was with regard to food, or accommodation, or individual respect and dignity, the right to equality is fully guaranteed within the framework of sangha law. But in hierarchy and promotion seniority was the guiding principle. When there was a problem with regard to seating precedence Buddha said, 'I allow you, O bhikkhus, to sit on the same seat with those who are within three years of one another.'[48]

If a person committed a crime and was expelled from the sangha, only to return later with the plea that he or she has

repented and seeks re-entry, after a thorough examination of his or her conduct outside the sangha, readmission could be granted. This is known as turning up the bowl. The case of Vaddha the Likkavi [*sic*] is a good example. When he pleaded that he had realized his mistake after his bowl had been turned down, with the intervention of Buddha the sangha resolved that 'the bowl is turned up again by the sangha as regards Vaddha the Likkavi and he is as one who has dealings with the sangha. The sangha approves thereof.'[49] There were cases where the sangha resolved not to approach families outside the sangha that misbehaved with sangha members out begging for alms. Such families must have felt boycotted, for they also seem to have approached the sangha to put an end to the proscription.[50] Buddhist jurisprudence thus gave enormous scope for reforming the individual, hence some writers have ascribed to Gautama Buddha the role of a successful reformer.[51]

On Duties

A careful reading of the *Suttas* gives us an impression that Buddha laid more stress on duties and on strictly implementing canonical laws and discipline.[52] As in the case of rights, Buddha spelt out the duties of the state and of the people in contrast with the state. Kosambi rightly says, 'The Buddhist scriptures work out the duties of a householder and peasant, regardless of caste, wealth, profession—and with no attention whatever to ritual—with consummate skill but in the simplest words . . . Most important of all, Buddha ventures to propound new duties for the absolute monarch. The king who merely collected taxes from land troubled by brigands and anti-social elements was not doing his duty.' Buddha suggested methods to arrest these anti-social elements. According to him, force and draconian punishment could never suppress banditry and strife; the root of this social evil was poverty and unemployment. This was not to be bribed away by charity and donations, which only reward and further stimulate evil action; the correct way was to supply seed and food to those who lived by agriculture and cattle breeding, while those who were traders should be furnished with the necessary capital. The servants of the state should be paid properly and regularly so they

would not find ways to exploit and pauperize the janapadas.

Kosambi's analysis of the duties imposed on the state by Buddha sounds like the duties emphasized in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution. The fact that Buddha had such a view of the state and its rulers indicates that he had a vision of an ideal society. Kosambi's comment about the intellectual achievement of Buddhism is worth quoting. He says, 'This is a startlingly modern view of political economy. To have propounded it at a time of Vedic yajna economy to a society that had just begun to conquer the primeval jungle was an intellectual achievement of the highest order.'[53] In Buddha's view the state has an obligation to the people to improve their conditions. The Buddhist sangha were the ideal institution in which experiments with Buddhist canonical laws could be carried out.[54] The duties the sangha laid down both for institutions and individuals within it were in substance the reasoning of Buddha himself, who at different stages of the sangha's development formulated almost every major duty it advocated. These can be divided into three categories: (*i*) political duties, (*ii*) economic duties and (*iii*) social duties.[55]

Political Duties

The sangha's most important duty was that it should uphold dhamma. This meant it should ensure equality among its members, be collectively responsible for their well-being, and uphold democratic values and procedures.[56] Politically the sangha had to follow the principle of democracy and render justice to every individual involved in any conflict. Buddha said, 'So long as the brethren meet together in full and frequent assemblies; meet together in concord, and rise in concord and carry out in concord the duties of order . . . so long may the brethren be expected, not to decline, but to prosper.'[57] Even more significantly Buddha prescribed an elaborate political etiquette to the bhikkhus. Every member was obliged to bring to the sangha's notice any violation of law by any member. Any quarrel, strife, contention, difference of opinion, contradiction, opposition, instance of cantankerousness, in fact any issue which involved legal questions needed to be debated.

Buddha categorically laid down this rule to settle disputes. He said that all are to meet together at one spot, then it is the duty of a bhikkhu who is knowledgeable about the issue to tell the assembly that such and such persons were guilty of such and such offence. If an individual were to come to know of an offence but choose to conceal it, that too would be taken as an offence. The member bringing the matter before the sangha should say, 'I would confess in the midst of the sangha, both on behalf of these venerable ones and on my behalf, both such offence as is theirs and such offence as is my own.' The sangha would then discuss the issue on its merit and take a decision. They gave priority to ideological questions which involved dhamma and the political duties of members. Mistakes should be discovered as soon as possible and rectified before they damaged the sangha's political image.[58] If a member found himself or herself unable to put up with the hardships and rigours of the political and legal duties, he had a right to 'declare his weakness and acknowledge himself unfit for the discipline and throw off the robes'.[59] As part of their duties, no member was to 'dispraise Buddha, dispraise dhamma and dispraise the sangha.'[60] Buddha placed the dhamma above the sangha and above himself. However, by stressing the unquestionability of dhamma and sangha, Buddha at times subsumed the individual in the sangha and dhamma.

Economic Duties

It is a well-known fact that for certain things the sangha depended on alms. Whether it was with regard to food, furniture, robes, beds or viharas, the sangha system depended on society. Once these things were acquired it was the duty of the members to maintain, clean and repair them. It was also their duty to declare that after death their belongings would become sangha property. There were several conflicts on this question and finally Buddha declared, when one is on his deathbed one should say 'After I am gone, let my set of necessaries become the property of the sangha.'[61] Thus by law Buddha made the sanghas the custodian of all property.

One day the followers of Assagi and Punabhasu[62] said to one another, 'Let us divide all the sleeping accommodation belonging to the sangha. Sariputta and Moggallana are men of sinful desires;

we will not provide places for them.'[63] And they did so. To avoid such misappropriation of sangha property a law was passed to the effect that 'sangha property is not apportionable and is not to be divided either by the sangha or by the gana or by individuals'.[64] Then it was made the duty of every citizen to protect sangha property and see that it was not divided among members for their personal possession.

In fact the economic duties of the members vis-à-vis sangha property were laid out in detail. It was the duty of the bhikkhus to preserve and maintain sangha property without hesitation. For example, 'In whatever vihara a bhikkhu is staying, he should clean it, while cleaning the mat used for sitting, the bolster should be put on one side and the bed frame should be rolled and put on the other side; whosoever sees a pot of drinking water or of washing water, or a chamber or utensil empty and void he should put it in its proper place.' A bhikkhu who wished to leave the vihara invariably should follow the following routine: '[He or she] should put the wooden articles and earthenware in order, close the doors and lattices, give the sleeping places in the charge of someone and only then set out.'[65] Similarly several rules were laid down with regard to repairs. 'The bhikkhu who is overseer shall zealously exert himself to end that work,' and shall afterwards cause repairs to be executed wherever the buildings have become damaged and worn out. 'If the vihara leaks, it should be repaired if he can, or he should exert himself to get the vihara roofed.'[66] The economic duties that Buddha assigned to the bhikkhus were mainly those which would create a communal feeling of ownership among them.

Social Duties

Though we do not have much information as to what social duties Buddha sought to impose on the state and general society we have an elaborate discussion of the social rules he prescribed to the sangha. There is an interesting narration in the *Dulva* which exemplifies Buddha's social awareness. While explaining his theories to King Ajatasatru, Buddha said, 'Let us suppose you have a slave, an attendant without a will of his own, who knows no pleasure of his own. This man seeing you in your palace in possession of everything which can gratify the senses living in the

midst of more than human bliss, thinks, "Ajatasatru is a man and I am also a man."' Buddha further says, 'Suppose that he gives up his slavish life and joins the sangha by becoming a bhikkhu, would Your Majesty on hearing this say, "Bring the man here; he shall again be my slave, my attendant, without a will of his own?"'[67] In this discourse Ajatasatru was made to accept that such a bhikkhu should be respected as he would respect any other bhikkhu. From this it is clear that Buddha recognized slavery as an inhuman institution and he found a way to oppose it by admitting former slaves into the sangha. And he made it a duty of sovereigns to treat slaves as human beings.

However, more interesting are the social duties laid down for sangha members. Most of these were related to culture and behaviour.[68] New bhikkhus, not knowing the disciplinary rules, entered the arama in their sandals, with their heads muffled up and their upper robes carried in bundles on their heads; they washed their feet in the drinking water and did not salute resident bhikkhus senior to them. When this came to the notice of Buddha he laid down these rules:

> One ought to take off his sandals, turn them upside down, beat them, put down his sunshade [cap], uncover his head, arrange his upper robe on his back and then carefully and slowly enter the arama. He should then inquire which water is meant for drinking and which for washing. He himself should fetch water and drink. If the resident bhikkhus be senior, he ought to salute them. If one needs a dwelling place he ought to ask where lawfully occupiable dwellings are and make room for himself.[69]

Occupying the conference hall was treated as a crime. A bhikkhu at the time of entry should already know when he had to vacate the vihara. The duties of resident bhikkhus were also specifically laid down: 'a resident bhikkhu on seeing an incoming senior bhikkhu ought to make a seat ready for him, provide water for him, provide footstool and a towel to wash his feet. He ought to wipe his sandals,' and so on. The seniors were to be provided with several things by the juniors.

There were detailed rules to be observed when the bhikkhus went begging for alms. 'When boiled rice is being given out he should hold his bowl with both hands and receive the rice in it. Room should be left for the curry.' When the food was being distributed in the viharas all were to get an equal quantity—the principle of equality was more strictly observed in situations of scarcity and also if there was ghee, oil or delicacies. Those who were going on their rounds for alms were to keep their undergarments and robes properly, and were to be decently dressed. They were not to enter the gates roughly; nor stand at too great a distance, nor too near.

The *Chullavagga* tells us a story of a bhikkhu who entered an inner chamber of a house by mistake, where he saw a naked woman lying asleep. Realizing he had used the wrong door, he left at once, but when the husband entered and saw his wife thus, he thought 'My wife has been defiled by that bhikkhu.' So the husband seized and beat him. He was let off after the woman told her husband that the bhikkhu had done nothing.

After this incident Buddha laid down that the bhikkhus should be careful in entering and leaving the houses. 'When food is being given to him, he should lift up his robe with his left hand so as to disclose his bowl, take the bowl in both his hands and receive the food in it. And he should not look into the face of the woman who is giving the food. He should take notice whether she seems willing or not to give curry. If she wipes a spoon, or wipes or puts aside a dish, he should still stand' otherwise he should leave the house.

There was an elaborate procedure as to how the bhikkhus were to eat food. The alms given were to be eaten with minds alert, paying attention to the bowl. Others' bowls were not to be looked at with envy. The mouth was not to be opened till the ball (of food) was brought close to it. The bhikkhu was not to talk with his mouth full, nor to make hissing sounds while eating and so forth.[70]

The bhikkhunis had to follow some additional rules. For example, when one bhikkhuni went for alms to a lady who had just had an abortion, the lady requested the bhikkhuni to take away the foetus in her bowl and dispose of it. When the sangha came to know of this, it passed a rule that 'a bhikkhuni is not to carry a

foetus: whoever does so shall be guilty of a dukkata.'[71] Though these duties appear minor and apolitical their importance lies in the fact that the sangha's survival depended on them. Unfortunately, hardly anybody has analysed the political significance of these duties or obligations on the members. Perhaps the only politician who understood the *political* significance of such principles was Mao Zedong who also codified similar obligations on the members of the Chinese Communist Party, thus contributing to its popularity and acceptability to the people.[72] We do not know whether Mao took these principles from Buddhist sangha practice, but Buddhist principles were influential in China and Mao believed in learning from the past.

Comparison with Ancient Hindu Thinkers

This examination of the Buddhist understanding of division of labour, property, rights and duties clearly indicates that Buddha was not only creating and experimenting with alternative institutions but his whole enterprise was to create a counter-culture to prevailing society. Kautilya worked out a detailed legal system to strengthen the state economically. The aim of his state was to monitor the individual, allowing no one to become rich enough to pose a threat to the state.[73] What is important is that Buddha did not allow any scope for the growth of bureaucracy in sangha life, whereas Kautilya envisaged a large bureaucratic establishment.[74] Neither Kautilya nor Manu seem to have had a comparable theory of division of labour, which for Buddha meant specialization in tasks. Those who could not specialize in a skill took up some other of equal importance to society, and thus composing Vedas was no more important than tilling the land. As R. S. Sharma rightly said, 'The Buddhists considered agricultural operation to be extremely important.'[75] In Buddha's view each task had its own importance and thus he upheld the dignity of labour.

Buddha differed from ancient Hindu thinkers on the question of private property in land. The Hindu thinkers not only granted such rights but also worked out a detailed revenue administrative system.[76] Buddha believed in collective ownership; whatever vihara property was there was in the hands of the sangha. As the

rare references quoted in this chapter show, ownership of landed property by the sangha was always for a collective purpose. Once the sangha system ensured that members who died or left the sangha had to leave their property to the sangha, the roots of the growth of private property and hereditary inheritance were cut. On the one hand Hindu thinkers allowed unfettered growth of monarchical property, while they also granted the individual private property in land and gold. To resolve this contradiction Kautilya granted absolute power of adjudication to the state.[77]

Though Manu and Kautilya prescribed certain limitations to state power against citizen's rights, the people's rights were not uniform. According to Hindu thinkers Sudras do not have any political rights. Saletore points out that as we reach the times of Kautilya we find a longer and more detailed list of the duties of kings who, as in the earlier ages of Manu, represented the state.[78] Though the term 'protection' (to be provided by the king) was repeatedly mentioned, this protection was not that of one class against the other but of all sections of the people from wild animals, demons and so on. Of course, protecting the state from invasion by foreigners was more in the interest of the king himself than that of the people. To the Sudra masses it did not matter much who was king, as they hardly had any rights. Contrary to Hindu practice, in the sangha bhikkhus had full right to protection irrespective of birth. The sangha members collectively looked after the sick, insane and old people. Unlike Hindu law, Buddhist law provided for equality both in terms of rights and duties irrespective of caste, creed and sex.

Comparison with Ancient Greek Thinkers

While Socrates does not have much to share with Buddha on the question of division of labour and private property both Plato and Aristotle are comparable to Buddha in many respects. In Western political philosophy, Plato was the first to raise the question of division of society into three classes and the first to forbid private property to the ruling classes. The Platonic society was divided into guardians (philosophers), warriors and producers, and Plato assigns each class a particular duty—the philosophers should rule, the warriors should protect and the producers should pro-

duce.[79] Plato seems to believe that this division of society is based on division of labour itself. The Platonic society and its justification were based on his idealist concept of human nature because though Plato is said to have been the first dialectician of the West, his division of labour compartmentalizes society so much that the social mobility of the 'appetite' class is completely arrested.[80]

Buddha, on the other hand, believed that some people might contemplate god, some might make mantras and some might produce. According to him neither the contemplator nor the *mantric* nor the producer was prohibited from changing their occupation. To Buddha functional division of labour was temporary and during an individual's life he or she could take up as many occupations as possible. Thus the Buddhist theory of division of labour challenged the brahminical varnadharma that made functional mobility impossible.

One question on which there appears to be a similarity between Buddha and Plato was their approach to 'private property'. Plato advocates denial of private property to the philosophers and warriors, whereas Buddha thinks that private property as an institution is antagonistic to equality and human dignity. Therefore, unlike in the Platonic city-state, in the sangha private property was completely socialized. Buddha and Plato also seem to hold similar opinions on the question of rights and duties of citizens. Both of them, however, subordinate individuals to the establishment. If Plato asks for subordination of the individual to the city-state Buddha emphasizes the welfare of the sangha as a whole.[81]

Aristotle was a strong supporter of the institution of slavery whereas Buddha was opposed to slavery in principle. In the sangha no such practice was allowed, and each individual had to do his or her ordained work within the sangha. Aristotle was an adherent of private property (including landed property) because in his opinion the urge to acquire it arises out of man's nature itself, and that the family as a unit should have a right to own property.[82] According to him, slaves were part of the property of the master and the state had no business interfering with this institution. This is where Buddha greatly differed from Aristotle, for in his formulation individuals have moral and political obligations towards each other, but property as an institution has to

be in the hands of the corporate body.[83] The fact that he made it a law that all members of the sangha should make a will declaring the sangha to be their sole heir is a clear indication of his view.[84] It is abundantly clear that Buddha was communistic in approach, whereas all the ancient Greek thinkers were for advancing their city-states from slavery to feudalism. Plato's communism of wives and property of the ruling class was a contradiction because while the ruling class was denied property and family it gained hegemony over the state whereas the working class, though allowed to have family and property, was denied all other rights including political power. In his scheme the working class was made to produce for the well-being of the two upper classes.[85] However, while Plato allows selective mating of the ruling class for procreation, Buddha prohibits sexual intercourse altogether. In this respect Buddha's system also suffers from contradictions.

NOTES

1. Land and industries are known as productive property structures, while houses and household instruments that are used to facilitate life are normally treated as consumer property.
2. The debate over the base and superstructure is well known in the Marxian paradigm. According to Marxism land, industries (small or big) and other property structures form part of the base, as do working human beings or 'animate productive forces'. Religion, politics and culture and the institutions that emerge from them are part of the superstructure. Marxism maintains that the superstructure always depends on the base. See Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 355-358.

   Thinkers like Gramsci thought that superstructural (cultural) hegemony itself may play a significant role in capturing state power and in changing the base. He emphasized the autonomous role of the superstructure. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), pp. 123-147.
3. Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, p. 100. When Rockhill translated the *Vinaya Pitaka (Dulva)* and arranged it in the form of a life story, as he inform

us in his introduction, he compared it with many other versions including the Pali one. Thus Rockhill's translation can be taken as the most authentic source.

4. The Hindu ascetics and philosophers' main concern was with what happened to an individual after death. In their view what happened to the individual on this earth, in this life was not important. Shankaracharya says that life here is only *maya* or *midya*.
5. In this respect Buddha resembles Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.
6. Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, p. 100. Also see T. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), vol. 2, p. 3 where it is suggested that Buddhism is founded on a very minute analysis of human personality.
7. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, Chapter 1, Selected Works, vol. 1 (Moscow: np 1973), pp. 19-20.
8. There is a tendency among modern scholars of philosophy to say that what Marx and Engels said has already been discussed in the Vedas or by Buddha—this is a very unscientific way of comparing Buddha and Marx.
9. Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy*, p. 60.
10. See Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 105.
11. See chapter 5 where Buddha's concept of freedom was discussed at some length.
12. *Vinaya Pitaka*, quoted in Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, pp. 7, 8, 78.
13. The word 'stealing' seems to have been used in the sense of exploitation of a particular individual's labour by another whose right to own it is not recognized.
14. Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, p. 9.
15. Kosambi, *Historical Outline*. p. 107.
16. Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, p. 9.
17. The modern understanding of caste is that it is a specific occupational group bearing the relationship of eating, drinking and living together. Marriage outside the caste is prohibited. See Ambedkar, 'Annihilation of Caste', *Writings and Speeches* 1979, vol. 1, pp. 23-99.
18. Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, pp. 143, 148, 113.
19. See Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 3, 1987, p. 442.
20. Oldenburg, p. 356.
21. *Chullavagga*, pp. 157-224.
22. Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 107.
23. *Mahavagga*, I-IV, Translated by Rhys Davids and Oldenburg, SBE,

vol. 13, pp. 298-324.

24. See 7th para of Sanghadisesa Rules of the *Mahavagga*, SBE, p. 9.
25. See the detailed footnote the translators give to *Nissaggiya Pakittiya Dhamma*, SBE, vol. 13, p. 18.
26. Oldenburg, Buddha, p. 361.
27. *Chullavagga*, Sixth Khandaka, SBE, vol. 20, pp.157, 158, 159.
28. See SBE, vol. 13, pp. 143-144, where it is further mentioned that Bimbisara took a golden vessel (with water in it, to be poured over Buddha's hands); and dedicated the garden to the Blessed One . . . The Blessed One accepted the arama park.
29. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, where he says, 'But strictly was the receiving of gold and silver forbidden to Buddha's disciples individually as well as collectively,' p. 357.
30. See the comment of Rhys Davids and Oldenburg, SBE, vol. 13, pp. 26-27.
31. Oldenburg, *Buddha*, pp. 357, 358.
32. *Chullavagga*, pp. 210-211.
33. *Chullavagga*, IV-IX, where the rules regarding attending sick people, distribution of robes and other materials and so on are available.
34. See *Nissaggiya Pakittiya Dhamma*, SBE, vol. 13, pp. 18-19.
35. 'Whatsoever bhikkhu shall have his soiled robe washed, or dyed or beaten by a bhikkhuni who is not related to him, that is a Pakittiya offence.' A similar statement is made about washing 'goats' wool' in 17th *Nissaggiya*. See SBE, vol. 13, pp. 20-26.
36. See *Chullavagga*, SBE, vol. 20, pp. 164-167, 171, 179, also pp. 5-6.
37. Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 107.
38. Chattopadyaya, *Lokayata*, pp. 483-494, 479.
39. Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, pp. 90-91.
40. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 479.
41. Oldenburg, *Buddha*, p. 483.
42. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 483.
43. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 3, pp. 450-451.
44. The varnadharma theory denied to Sudras the right to read and learn the Vedas and scriptures in those days. In essence it meant denying them the right to free thought and expression. They were also not allowed to enter religious gatherings; this was nothing but denying them the right to assembly. After the Rig Vedic period women's position was no different.
45. Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, p. 55, see footnote 4. As we have already

discussed, in the early years of the sangha Buddha used to admit low caste bhikkhus on his own authority, but in this case he was also doubtful whether the sangha would accept it. But because of the force of his personality they accepted Upali's admission.

46. It is said that during Buddha's lifetime there were hundreds of women in the sangha but we have evidence for only 73 whose writings were recorded in the *Therigatha*.
47. *Chullavagga*, IV-XII contains this codification in detail, beginning, 'The single bhikkhu speaks not in accordance with the right, the many speak not in accordance with the right, the sangha speaks not in accordance with the right.' This proposition is discussed to a logical end and a general principle is evolved. See *Chullavagga*, pp. 8-19.
48. Rhys Davids and Oldenburg in their note explained that *Ukkepaniya-Kamma* means depriving him of his right to eat and dwell with other Bhikkus. See *Chullavagga*, pp. 120, 206-207.
49. 'Turning up the bowl' is used in the case of readmitting a bhikkhu and 'turning down the bowl' in the sense of expulsion from the sangha. See *Chullavagga*, pp. 123-124, 125.
50. The stature of the sangha by then was such that the going of a bhikkhu to a particular family enhanced the family's social status, hence such a boycott would be galling to the householders.
51. See Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 459.
52. Every state that promotes collective life emphasizes duties more than rights for the simple reason that such a state has a constitutional obligation to fulfil the basic needs of its citizens. For example, modern socialist states also laid more emphasis on citizens' duties than on rights, but in the recent past such emphasis has been questioned in China and East European countries. A careful study of the sangha system seems to provide a solution to this problem as the Buddhist sanghas struck a reasonable balance between rights and duties in collective life. This practice has more relevance because both in the sangha and the socialist system individual private property is not allowed.
53. See Kosambi, *Historical Outline*, p. 113. Though Kosambi does not give the reference of the source from which he arrives at this conclusion we can certainly assume that a historian of his stature would not conclude thus without any evidence.
54. The question whether the canonical laws regulated only the sangha system or extended to the rest of society was a serious one. Though

the canonical laws were strictly enforceable only in the sangha, Buddha repeatedly tried to extend them to the rest of society and also to the state.

55. A careful study of the *Chullavagga* from the fourth to the tenth Khandaka provides us with enough evidence for such a division of duties.
56. The detailed rules laid down in the *Chullavagga*, particularly in the fifth and sixth Khandakas which deal with the daily life of the bhikkhus, their dwellings and furniture and so on, discusses various aspects of the responsibilities of the sangha towards the members.
57. The *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* discusses these duties; in it Buddha suggests to the sangha the principle that needs to be followed to preserve democracy. SBE, vol. 11, pp. 6-7.
58. It is the bounden duty of each member to bring to the notice of the sangha the mistakes he himself commits as and when he realizes that it was a mistake or violation of law or misconduct. See *Chullavagga*, pp. 32-33.
59. See *Paradika Dhamma* in Vinay texts, SBE, vol. 13, p. 4. See Rhys Davids and Oldenberg's clarification to rule one in their footnote.
60. *Chullavagga*, p. 120
61. Ibid., pp. 343-344.
62. Within the sangha there were subdivisions where the senior members were supposed to guide teams of juniors which were known by the name of the senior leader.
63. Sariputta and Moggallana were next to Buddha in the order. After the death of these two bhikkhus, Upali, Maha Kassapa and Ananda became prominent.
64. *Chullavagga*, p. 211.
65. The Eighth Khandhaka regulates the duties of the bhikkhus towards one another. In it we find a detailed discussion of the economic duties of sangha members. See *Chullavagga*, pp. 295, 292, 282.
66. At some stage the bhikkhus were also allowed to participate in construction work. The word 'work' here refers to such work. See *Chullavagga*, p. 190. The chapter on dwellings and furniture contains many more details.
67. Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, p.105.
68. For details see the chapter that deals with 'Regulations and Duties' of the bhikkhus and also the chapter on the duties of bhikkhunis in *Chullavagga*, pp. 272-369. Also see Bennett's introduction to *Digha*

Nikaya, p.18 where he mentioned the five main declarations that the bhikkhus have to make. They are:

1. I undertake to abstain from killing,
2. I undertake to abstain from taking that which is not given,
3. I undertake to abstain from unlawful sexual intercourse ,
4. I undertake to abstain from falsehood,
5. I undertake to abstain from taking stupefying drinks and drugs.

69. *Chullavagga*, pp. 272, 273, 275.
70. *Chullavagga*, pp. 281-282, 287-289, 290-291.
71. *Chullavagga*, pp 345-346. The story tells us that this woman became pregnant when her husband was away and hence she was afraid to throw the foetus away herself.
72. For details see Mao's articles 'On Ultra-democracy', 'On the Disregard of Organisational Discipline', 'On Absolute Equalitarianism', 'On Subjectivism', 'On Individualism', 'On the Ideology of Roving Rebel Bands', *Selected Works of Mao-Tse-tung* (now known as Mao Zedung), vol. 1. It is important to see Mao's Red Book on the question of party discipline.
73. Even Kautilya's most sympathetic critics have accepted that he adopted ruthless methods to collect taxes. See Somnath Dhar, *Kautilya*, pp. 101-123.
74. Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 285.
75. Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 121.
76. The Mauryan rural administrative system was large and mostly geared to collecting land taxes. See Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 288.
77. According to Kautilya royal order supercedes all other authorities including dharma. See Sharma, *Aspects*, p. 285.
78. According to *Manusmriti*, 'The king has been created to be the protector of the castes and others, who all, according to their ranks, discharge their social duties.' The duties are assigned on an unequal basis and the rights are also granted unequally. See Saletore, *Ancient Indian Political Thought*, p. 67.
79. M. G. Gupta, *History of Political Thought from the Greeks to Grotius* (Allahabad: Chaitanya Publishing House, 1984), p. 33.
80. Plato, *Republic*, p. 114.
81. Mukhopadhyaya, *Western Political Thought*, p. 13.
82. Nersesyants, *Ancient Greece*, p. 152.
83. For details, see Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, pp. 90-91.

84. *Chullavagga*, p. 344.
85. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were unanimous that while retaining the class composition of society, slaves should be treated as human beings so that they would participate in production with more energy. This would increase the wealth and leisure available for developing ruling class culture and arts. This transforms society from a master-slave economy to a feudal one. See Wood and Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*, pp. 259-265, Nersesyants, *Ancient Greece*, pp. 93-146, Mukhopadhyaya, *Western Political Thought*, pp. 1-42.

7

Class and Caste

TO UNDERSTAND the ideological position of Buddha on class and caste questions there is a need to clarify the definition of caste and class. Here I have treated the four major divisions of ancient Indian society—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra—as four classes.[1] The concept of class assumes that a particular class group has to share particular productive or socioeconomic functions at a given time. In ancient India by and large Brahmins were involved in priesthood, ritual practices and related functions such as asceticism, composing and reciting Vedas and *Sastras* and so on. The Kshatriyas were largely involved in maintaining the state through military action. The Vaisyas were in the beginning supervisors of agriculture but subsequently took up trade. To the Sudras fell agricultural work, artisanship, slavery and so on.[2] But in one respect these class categories acquire a caste dimension in the Indian context. There was no mobility within these occupational groups, and their work not only became hereditary but rigidly exclusive. Nevertheless, I consider the case for treating the varnas as class categories to be strong, and shall refer to them as such.

Then the question of what constitutes a caste must be dealt with. A caste is a subdivision of a class (varna) which forbids commensality and intermarriage.[3] In this sense the caste division segregated the Sudras more than any other class. Each occupational group within the Sudras was given the status of a subcaste.[4] I shall treat untouchables as part of the group of Sudras.[5] It appears that within the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, though there were (and are) subcastes these were mainly based on *gotra* differences and the segregation between the subcaste groups of

these three upper classes were (are) not so total as that among the subgroups of the Sudras. Thus, in spite of subdivisions within the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, their identity as three classes who had control and hegemony over knowledge, state power and trade relations remained uncompromised. The Sudras, on the other hand, were (are) divided into innumerable castes making their unity as a class impossible. We shall examine Buddha's thesis with this perspective in mind. We can better appreciate Buddha's ideas and the practice of the sangha if we study these questions in the light of the interpretation of Hindu thinkers, particularly Manu and Kautilya.

Manu and Kautilya on Class and Caste

Manu, who is taken as the source of Hindu law, has pre-ordained the functions of different classes and castes very rigidly. Talking of Brahmins he says, 'Even if engaged in all kinds of occupations which are looked upon with disfavour, the Brahmin should be reverenced at all times.' Of Kshatriyas he says, 'Since the Kshatriya caste arose from the Brahmin, the Brahmin caste alone should be the one to subdue the Kshatriya caste at all times.' He says that the Brahmin caste is produced from water and fire, the Kshatriya from stone and iron. In their own birthplaces their all-pervading force is quenched, and hence they should accept Brahmin superiority. Of Vaisyas he says, 'A vaisya, after being initiated and having married, should be always employed in gaining wealth and in tending cattle. Prajapati had created cattle, he gave them over to the Vaisya, while he gave all the people to the Brahmans and to the king.' Further, he says, 'He [the Vaisya] should understand the sowing of seeds, should know the defects and qualities of land, and be well acquainted with the application of measures and of weights in all.'

Of the Sudras, Manu says, 'Now the supreme duty of a Sudra, and that which ensures his bliss, is merely obedience towards celebrated priests who understand the Vedas and live as householders.' What was it that Manu promised if the Sudras were obedient to Brahmans? 'If he be pure, obedient to the higher castes, mild in speech, without conceit, and always submissive to the Brahmans, he attains a high birth [in the next life].'[6]

Within a short period the situation seems to have changed. The Vaishyas seem to have been included in the category of the twice born. Hence in the tenth chapter of the same book Manu says, 'The Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas constitute the three twice-born castes; but the fourth, the Sudras, have only one birth.' Thus he completely isolates the Sudras. According to Manu, the division of subcaste groups within the Sudras was a result of a section's 'misbehaviour' with the upper classes in general and the Brahmins in particular. This comes out very clearly from Manu's statement that 'acting in a manner opposed to the caste order, the degraded outcasts beget again those degraded and still more outcast.'[7]

As they were declared degraded, the duties of the Sudra castes were specified by the Brahmins themselves. According to Manu, depending on their status as fixed by the Brahmins, management of horses and driving wagons was the business of the *Suttas*; the practice of medicine of the *Ambastas*; attendance on women of the *Vaidehakas*; fishing of the *Nisadas*, carpentry of the *Ayogavas*; hunting of the *Medas*, Andhra *Concus* and *Madgas*, trapping animals that live in holes of the *Ksattars*, *Ugras* and *Pukkasas*; dealing with the skin of the *Dhigvanas*; making of instrumental music of the *Venas*.

Manu specified where some of these Sudra castes, carrying a mark of their order and occupied in their own works, should live: in places for burning the dead, around trees of temples in the mountains and in the woods. Finally Manu fixes the social place of Chandalas who even today live as the last layer of the society. He says, 'The dwellings of Chandalas and Chvapachas should be outside the village, they should be deprived of dishes; their property consists of only dogs and asses. Their clothes should be the garments of the dead, and their food should be in broken dishes; their ornaments should be of iron, and they must constantly wander about.'[8] Now let us see what Kautilya has to say.

To avoid repetition, instead of quoting from the *Arthashastra* itself we shall examine the summarized explanation by B. P. Sinha. He says,

> Brahmans as a class not only enjoyed respect, privileges and gifts, movable and immovable articles, they also exercised

considerable influence on administration. There is little doubt that most of the judges, ambassadors and high officers, spies and soothsayers, astrologers were Brahmans. A *purohita*, a *mantrin* and a member of the selection committee for high grades of officers, was invariably a Brahmana.

About Kshatriyas, the *Arthashastra* view was that:

> [They] were second only to the husbandmen (Brahmins) and they should lead a life of ease and freedom. Their main duties were studying, performing sacrifices, giving gifts to Brahmans and protecting the people and wearing arms. Thus, they constituted the army and the executive authority—the ruling class in action. The Vaisyas were engaged in studying, performing sacrifices, making gifts and above all in producing wealth by taking to agriculture, cattle rearing and trade. They were most populous class and by far the majority of the cultivators.[9]

According to the *Arthashastra*, the Sudras, the lowest in the social ladder, were given a place in the Aryan fold.[10] Their main duties were service to the three upper varnas. Actors and artisans were mostly Sudras. Further, Sudras as a class were deprived of opportunity for education which was meant for three varnas only, and were also not entitled to perform Vedic sacrifices. Kautilya also describes several occupational groups within the Sudras. Apart from the labourers who did all sorts of odd duties in the royal courts and the homes of Brahmin families, goldsmiths, glass blowers, dust washers, cattle herders, dairy workers, weavers and so on were mentioned. The rates of their wages were fixed.[11]

Manu and Kautilya, beyond any doubt, made it clear that the three upper classes should share different power-related functions like priesthood, statecraft and trade among themselves. Manu also declares the brahminical principle of the basis of superiority and inferiority within the Sudras by stating that each group's social status depended on their approach towards the Brahmins (or upper classes). The more a particular group was rebellious against the upper classes the lower would be its status. This clearly establishes the superiority of non-productive knowl-

edge as the key to political power and that 'knowledge', and thereby power, was denied the Sudras by both Kautilya and Manu.

However, as Manu himself put it, the contradictions between Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were also sharp at that time. Since the Kshatriyas were born of stone and iron their own birthplace quenched their all-pervading force, and the Vaisyas and the wealth they accumulated were also put at the command of the Brahmins as and when they needed it. Since the Kshatriyas were said to have been born out of Brahma's chest (a symbol of physical might), and the Brahmins from his head (the source of all knowledge) the social position of the Kshatriyas was fixed below that of the Brahmins. Wielding the pen was therefore (unsurprisingly as that was the Brahmins' own occupation) made superior to the wielding of weapons. Buddhism emerged out of these contradictions and its emergence gave rise to an ideological struggle. Buddha had worked out an alternative ideology to Brahminism. Despite repeated appeals by brahminical thinkers for Brahmin-Kshatriya unity as the only policy that could bring them prosperity, the breach between the two, nevertheless, took place.

Buddha on Class and Caste

Like every struggle within the ruling classes, the struggle between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas must have started to undermine the supremacy of Brahminism.[12] Buddha chose ideological rather than military means to attack brahminical hegemony and change the power equation. Perhaps that is the reason why Buddha asserts the Kshatriya supremacy by referring to himself. He says in the story of creation, 'Members of Kshatriya families cut off their hair and beard, they left their homes for the homeless state. The Brahmans and Vaisyas [were] treated with like respect.'[13] In the *Tevigga Sutta* Buddha declares his attitude towards several of the professions that Brahmins followed in his time.

> *Samana* Brahmanas who live on the food provided by the faithful continue to gain a livelihood by such low arts and such lying practices as these: giving advice in marriages, forming of alliances or the dissolution of connections; the

> calling [of] property or the laying of it out, teaching spells to procure property; to cause adversity to others; worshipping the sun, worshipping Brahma, spitting fire out of their mouth and laying hands on people's heads.

He declares that he will refrain from these practices and asks the sangha to follow suit. He goes on:

> [T]hey gain livelihood by sacrifices to the God of fire, offering of *Dabba* grass, offering with a ladle, offering the husks, of bran, of rice, of clarified butter, of oil for determining lucky sites, for protecting fields, for luck in war . . . by guessing at length of life and so on . Some *Samana* Brahmans gain their livelihood by such low arts and such lying practices [as saying] that there will be an eclipse of the moon, there will be an eclipse of the sun; there will be an eclipse of planets, the sun and the moon will be in conjunction; the sun and moon will be in opposition. There will be earthquakes, thunderbolts and forked lightning and so on.[14]

Thus, Buddha describes several other tasks that Brahmins were taking up and repeatedly characterizes them as liars and hypocrites. He was also not very appreciative of brahminical asceticism. According to Buddha it is not fasting nor going naked that makes a person great. He mocks the Brahmin ascetics saying, 'They lick their hands' and asserts that the bhikkhus were greater than the ascetics because they attained the mind of loving kindness that knows no anger, no ill will.

He was also very critical of their advice to the kings: 'They gain livelihood by such low arts like foretelling the future events as these . . . "The king within the city will attack; the king outside the city will retreat, the king within the city will gain victory, the king outside the city will be defeated" and so on.'[15] In the *Majjhima Sailam* Buddha refers to their addiction to storing property; their eating of meat, their drinking, their beds and perfumes. He also talks of their worldly pleasures of dancing, singing, feasts and so on and so forth, and adds, 'He [Buddha] on the other hand, refrains from such practices.'[16] Once when Buddha was staying at Savathi, about five hundred Brahmins of the city forced a young

Brahmin called Assalayana who was well versed in all brahminical learning to defeat Buddha in a debate. Assalayana told Buddha that Brahmins maintained that only they were the highest class, the true sons of Brahma, and all others are below them. Then he asked Buddha's opinion.

Buddha replied, 'Do the Brahmans really maintain this, Assalayana, when they were born of women just like anyone else, of Brahman women who had their periods and conceived, gave birth and nursed their children, just like any other women?' Assalayana was not convinced with this explanation. Buddha then asks, 'Have you ever heard that in the lands of the Greeks and Kambojas and other peoples on the borders there are only two classes, masters and slaves and a master can become a slave and vice-versa?' Assalayana says, 'Yes, I have heard so.' This clearly shows that Buddha was knowledgeable about the Greeks. He continues, 'What strength or support does that fact give to the Brahman's claim?' Assalayana was not convinced. The Buddha then gives another interesting example. 'Now suppose a king were to gather together a hundred men of different classes and to order the Brahmans and Kshatriyas to take kindling wood of sal, pine, lotus or sandal, and light fires, while the low class folk did the same with common wood. What do you think would happen, would the fires of the highborn men blaze up brightly and those of the humble fail?' Assalayana realizes that it would be alike with high and lowly.[17]

Buddha's disapproval of such deceitful practices by Brahmins has to be seen in the context of the transformations that were taking place at that time. Of all the ritualistic practices then in vogue, sacrifices were the most important and the Brahmins were very much identified with them. Hence Buddha pointedly and specifically attacked the Vedic sacrifices, in which it was not unusual for 500 oxen, 500 male calves, 500 female calves and 500 sheep to be tied to the sacrificial post for slaughter. The slaves, messengers and hired labourers of the kings, threatened by fear and force, would make preparations for such sacrifices with tears in their eyes. When this was reported to Buddha he remarked that the aswamedha, purusamedha, vajapeya sacrifices did not produce good results. Sages of good conduct should not prescribe

those sacrifices and cause so many goats, sheep and cattle to be killed.[18]

According to a similar story in *Digha Nikaya*, when Buddha was touring Magadha, a Brahman called Kutadanta was preparing for a sacrifice with 700 bulls, 700 calves, 700 goats and 700 rams, but Buddha intervened and stopped him.[19] He seemed to have developed an antipathy not only to Brahmins who officiated at such sacrifices but also towards the Kshatriyas who were ordering them. As noted before, Buddha's rejection of animal sacrifice and emphasis on non-injury to animals assumed a new significance in the context of the new agriculture.[20] Buddha's disapproval of some brahminical practices does not show that he was against Brahmins as people. In fact his closest disciples Sariputta and Moggallana were Brahmins, who had been leading a religious life as followers of Sanjaya the Paribbajaka, before they were won over by the Buddha.[21] Indeed *Dulva* mentions that in the beginning thousands of Brahmans were won over to him.[22] He was opposed to the mystification with which the Brahmins were surrounding themselves by blunting the consciousness of the people, and also to their worldliness in the name of priesthood. More important, he was opposed to their claim of supremacy over Kshatriyas, and this brought him and his sangha widespread support from Kshatriyas and Vaisyas.[23] Because of the bitterness among these classes, according to Ambedkar, even the Buddhists came to be treated as untouchables. We do not have much evidence in the *Suttas* to prove this point but Ambedkar finds corroboration in Shudraka's play *Mricchakatika*.[24] However, this must refer to later practice.

The worldly living of Brahmins was posing a threat to the Kshatriyas for it was they who had to maintain the state whose productivity the Brahmins were throwing into crisis. The accumulating and storing of wealth by Brahmins and Vaisyas was resulting in scarcity, starvation and death among the masses.[25] Not that the Kshatriya kings were not storing wealth: they too were hoarding and spending on luxuries. In principle Buddha was opposed to the accumulation of wealth by a few households. In a *Sutta* he says:

'I behold the rich in this world, of goods which they have acquired, in their folly they give nothing to others, they eagerly heap riches together and further and still further they go in their pursuit of enjoyment. The king although he may have conquered the kingdoms of the earth, although he may have become ruler of all land this side the sea, up to the ocean's shore, would still, insatiate, covet that which is beyond the sea. The king and many other men, with desires unsatisfied, fall a prey to death. Neither relatives nor friends, nor acquaintances, save the dying man; the heirs take his property; but he receives the reward to his death, no treasures accompany him who dies, nor wife nor child, nor property nor kingdom.'

Oldenberg's comment was that the gulf between the poor and the wealthy, between knights and yeomen was a wide one. Such vast gulf between the rich and the poor must have created social conditions where misery and destitution increased. *Samyuttaka Nikaya* provides yet another important statement of Buddha which says that 'the riches that they were acquiring do not end the contradictions among the rich and the ruling classes. On the contrary they will increase.'

Buddha further says,

'The princes who rule kingdoms, rich in treasures and wealth, turn their greed against one another, pandering instability in the stream of impermanence, carried along by greed and carnal desire. Who then can walk on the earth in peace?'[26]

So, according to Buddha, peace is destroyed by carnal desires, which in turn tempt the powerful into exploitation of the masses. Therefore he had created an alternative sangha system where some solution to the problem of carnal desire and exploitation of one by the other is attempted. The establishment of the sangha that propagated a counter ideology to Brahminism was not a smooth process. Both the ascetic Brahmin sages and the beef-eating Brahmin priests seem to have strongly resisted the emer-

gence of Buddhist ideology. They seem to have thrown slanders against Buddha personally, to have spread lies about the sangha's strength and made attempts to distort his teaching. But Buddha did not remain quiet; he retorted to and exposed the lies they were telling against him and his sangha. His bitter struggle against Brahminism comes out clearly in his discussion with Kassapa, an ascetic Brahmin who came to defeat him in argument. Kassapa accuses Buddha of not having any followers and of delivering his thunderous speeches to empty places where no one assembled, like a lion roaring in the wilderness. Buddha replies that on the contrary many came to hear him, that his 'lion's roar' was heard by many with confidence. He also answers other questions put to him. His explanations satisfied his audience, if not Kassapa. His listeners were of the opinion that it was 'fitting to hear him'.[27] Any established order when faced with an emerging new school that threatens to destabilize it, will try to shake the confidence of the leader of the new school and spread rumours that he has no real following of his own. This is what ascetic Brahminism seemed be attempting, but Buddha asserted his leadership and declared his confidence in himself, his sangha and his dhamma.

He also saw innumerable wars within the rich and kingly families in furtherance of their greed and carnal desires. If we relate this to what Manu had said, that 'Sudras can own no property except things like dogs and asses' the new riches were accruing only to the three upper classes. Buddha thought that the degenerating brahminical class was providing an ideological basis for increasing contradictions among the rich and the poor—that is, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas on the one hand, and the Sudras on the other. In this situation it was natural that several Sudra revolts also occurred.[28] Buddha, it appears, supported the Sudras in two ways: (*i*) ideologically, by speaking against the caste system, and (*ii*) by admitting the Sudra castes into the sangha.

Buddha said, 'Just, O bhikkhus, as the great rivers—that is to say, the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Ahiravati, the Sarabhu and the Mahi—when they have fallen into the great ocean, renounce their name and lineage and are henceforth reckoned as the great ocean—just so, O bhikkhus, do these four castes—the Khattiyas, the Brahmanas, the Vaisyas and Sudras—when they have gone

forth from the world under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathagatha, renounce their names and lineage and enter into the order.'[29]

Given the times in which Buddha lived, this is a remarkable statement because the caste system had become so rigid by then that even the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were thoroughly indoctrinated into faith in hierarchical structures.[30] Since the Brahmins couched their language in terms of *swarga* (heaven) and *naraka* (hell) all the upper class people sincerely believed in the caste system and the Sudra masses were forced to accept it. Buddha used a telling metaphor when he said that 'these were like different rivers and the moment they reached the ocean they lost identity.' As he explained in his division of labour theory, these divisions are only based on different occupations and once they left their workplaces all would be one. The Buddhist order was like an ocean and the moment people joined it they lost their caste identity. Oldenberg says, 'The distinction of caste had no place in the Buddhist. Whosoever will be Buddha's disciple renounces his caste. The gospel of deliverance is not confined to the highborn alone, but is given to the welfare of many people.' Hence he characterizes Buddha's role as that of a 'reformer, who is conceived to have broken the chains of caste and won the confidence of the poor.'[31]

Rhys Davids concludes, with regard to the treatment of caste by the Buddha, that 'in the first place as regards his own order, over which alone he had complete control, he ignores completely and absolutely all advantages or disadvantages arising from birth, occupation and social status, and sweeps away all barriers and disabilities arising from the arbitrary rules of ceremonial or social impurity.'[32] For several of the new bhikkhus the egalitarian sangha system was unacceptable, and they wanted to introduce caste hierarchy into it. In one of the *Jatakas* we come across a debate between Buddha and the new bhikkhus, which goes as follows: Buddha comes to know that some bhikkhus were demanding prime places for themselves as they belonged to Kshatriya or Brahmin backgrounds. Buddha calls for a meeting of the assembly and places the issue before it: 'Who deserves to have the best quarters, the best water, the best food?' From some he received the reply 'He who was a *Kathiya* before he became initiated, he

who was Brahmana or a Gahapati.'[33] According to Fick, in his summation of the debate Buddha did not grant any caste-based privileges.

Apart from overt declarations that the sangha did not practice casteism, we have many examples of sangha members who felt absolutely freed from caste bondage and maltreatment after they joined. There is the recorded opinion of a disciple called Sunita in the *Theragatha*, who said,

> 'I have come of humble family; I was poor and needy. The work which I performed was lowly. Sweeping the withered flowers out of temples and other places. I was despised of men, looked down upon and lightly esteemed. With submissive mien, I showed respect to many. Then I beheld Buddha as he passed into the most important town of Magadha. Then I bowed and begged him to accept me as a monk. "Come hither," [he said] that was the initiation which I received.'[34]

From his story Sunita must have been an untouchable: he was looked down upon by society and was assigned only the task of sweeping the roads, which is assigned to untouchables even in modern India.[35] Because of the fact that the Buddha sangha was admitting untouchables Manu was supposed to have felt that even the Buddhists should be treated similarly.[36]

It appears that there was a lot of pressure on Buddha from Kshatriya forces to discourage the admission of Sudras and to show favours to Kshatriyas over Brahmins and others. For example, when Buddha asked King Prasenajit, 'Maharaja, why are you so very humble, so excessively humble, towards the Tathagata [Buddha himself]? Prasenajit replied 'Venerable One, I have seen those learned Brahmins, filled with pride in their learning, acting and speaking accordingly. I have seen their self-sufficiency and their intolerance for all other opinions.' Then Buddha asked, 'Why do you believe in me?' The king replies, 'Venerable One, I am of Kosala, the Blessed One is also of Kosala; I am of Kshatriya caste, and so is the Blessed One .'[37] This implies that the Kshatriyas were trying to take advantage of Buddha's background to mould the sangha into a Kshatriya clique against the Brahmins. But it is clear

from his theory and practice that Buddha resisted such attempts and went ahead in admitting all castes into the sangha. The most striking example is the admission of Upali against the wishes of Devadatta, recounted in Chapter 5.

Thus Buddha not only admitted Sudras and untouchables but if they proved worthy he allowed them to rise in the order to significant and leading positions. In the first council held at Rajagraha, after the death of Buddha, Maha Kassapa presided over the Assembly in which Upali and Ananda took an important part.[38] Such was the place of the former Sudra Upali in the sangha.[39]

But this does not mean that Buddha did not show any class preferences. We find two levels of operation with regard to class and caste issues. Based on his philosophical and ideological position, he admitted Sudras into the sangha in direct opposition to Brahminism. But at the same time, bowing to the exigencies of society, Buddha ordered bhikkhus not to admit soldiers who were in service, debtors or escaping slaves seeking asylum. This was done at the behest of Bimbisara, head of the imperial state, who also patronized the Buddhist order. This is where the Buddha's contradictions and limitations come out very clearly.

In conversation with Ajatasatru, Buddha said that a slave has a right to join the sangha and to become an arahat. His simple explanation was that the king was a man and the slave was also a man. Once this realization occurred to slaves they would ask for these rights and Buddha convinced the king that he had no right to thwart them. Further, he asks: if one of the king's slaves were to join the sangha and acquire all the qualities of bhikkhus, abstaining from slandering and malice, would the king say, 'Bring the man here; he shall again be my slave, my attendant, without a will of his own.'? The king, of course, admits he would treat the man with the respect due a bhikkhu.[40] Buddha was clear that discrimination should be based on one's deeds but not on one's birth. If a person indulged in slandering and malice, then irrespective of the nature of his/her work, he or she deserved no respect.

The *Mahavagga* provides an altogether different stand from Buddha's on the admission of slaves, soldiers, debtors and so on. At Bimbisara's instance, it says, Buddha agreed to pass a rule making it a dukkata offence to permit the pabbajja ordination to any person in royal service, or to any slave.[41] This goes to indicate

that Buddha changed his views from time to time. It is also quite possible that Buddha believed in principle that slavery and untouchability had to be eradicated, but given his background and the pressures from the king's partisans he must, at times, have compromised. In addition, the issue of production to which slave labour was crucial might have compelled him to take such a decision.

As a moralist Buddha prohibited membership of the sangha to debtors, robbers and prisoners. At first sight, one can understand the denial of entry to robbers and prisoners but not the debarring of debtors, as surely he must have been aware of how debt was used to keep poor families perpetually in bondage to their economic superiors. But even this has to be seen in the context of contemporary society, as Rahula Sankrityayana has observed. If the debtor defaulted the usurer had the legal claim to his very body: in other words, the usurer had a right to force him into slavery. In this situation many debtors were running away and joining the sangha to escape the tyrannical law. Buddha was not as opposed to the rising Vaisya class as he was to the hegemonic Brahmins. The usurers were mainly from the Vaisya class and Buddha may have helped their interests by prohibiting entry to debtors. Discussing Buddha's class bias, Chattopadhyaya says, 'The Buddha, it is said, rewarded the monarchs, merchants and usurers by laying down rules that definitely served their class interest.' He also cites the same example of Buddha's not admitting soldiers and officers at the instance of King Bimbisara: 'To pacify him [Bimbisara], Buddha laid down the rule that "No one in the royal service should be allowed to enter the order".'[42] In the case of prisoners and robbers Buddha must have felt that admitting such sections might bring discredit to the sangha among the masses, about which he was very much concerned.

However, even as he attempted to achieve social equality by admitting Sudras to the sangha, and experimented with the communal ownership of property, Buddha was very much inclined towards developing agrarian production. The *Digha Nikaya* and *Vinaya Pitaka* show concern for the good treatment of slaves and hired labourers. But at the same time, as R. S. Sharma has rightly put it, 'the Buddha, on the other hand, advises the householder to repay his debts and bars admission of debtors to the sangha.'

According to Sharma the *Digha Nikaya* propounds in several instances the idea that paying off debts brings a sense of great relief. 'Free from debt, an ideal caravan leader roams the world like a brave conqueror. What is more significant is that a trader is asked to create in others the confidence that he is capable of paying back debts along with the interest.' Sharma comes to the conclusion that 'the Buddha gave implicit support and also direct encouragement to lending money at interest.' Buddha must have done this to strengthen the Vaisya class which provided him with many strong supporters of his ideology. Thus his support to the Sudra class is conditional in the sense that caste inequalities and other related inhuman treatments were discouraged but Sudras as a class were asked to increase production. Added to this, Buddha's rejection of animal sacrifice and his emphasis on non-injury to animals assume significance in the context of the needs of the new agriculture.[43] His ideology, thus, worked as a double-edged knife. It attempted to attack the Brahminical class and at the same time supported the Kshatriya and Vaisya classes.

Comparison with Ancient Western Thinkers

As we have stressed in the beginning of this chapter the Western thinkers can be compared with Buddha only in respect of their attitude towards classes but not castes, as caste is an Indian specific. A meaningful comparison between Buddha and the ancient Greek thinkers calls for a brief statement about the nature of the class division in Greek city-states. These were broadly divided into three classes as against the four-class division of Indian society. In Greece slaves formed the lowest and largest class.[44] The traders, artisans and emerging farmers formed the next class, numerically also considerable. The third class comprised the rulers, soldiers and citizens. The latter were members of the city and entitled to take part in its political life.[45] Unlike Buddha who came from a class that ruled while nevertheless being treated as subordinate by the Brahmins, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle emerged from a ruling class facing the onslaught of Sophists who were the friends of the working class.

Though Socrates began his career as a homebred Sophist, gradually he turned into the first profound critic of Sophistic

philosophical and ethical conceptions.[46] While democracy based on knowledge became Socrates' main theme, he never stood by slaves. No statement was ever made by him exhorting the rulers to treat slaves as human beings. In this respect the Buddha was totally different. While recognizing the inevitability of the role of Sudras and slaves in production, his fight on their behalf against Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas was to conquer a socio-political space for them. In this respect a much clearer picture emerges if we compare Buddha with Plato and Aristotle.

Like the ancient Brahmins, Plato does not even recognize the right to education of the slave class. According to Plato the rulers or guardians were the supreme protectors, while the auxiliary protectors were the military and police force which carried out the rulers' orders in a variety of ways. Then there was the people who pursued their trades, professions or crafts but did not participate in government.[47] Buddha nowhere says that the Sudras have no right to participate in the governance of the country. On the contrary, it comes out clearly in sangha practice that all members had the political right not merely to participate but also to lead the sangha.[48] Though Plato's *Republic* states that it is not birth that determines whether one should be ruler or not, in essence it is birth that guides.[49]

For Aristotle a slave is a living possession in the arrangement of the family, and the servant is himself an instrument which takes precedence over all other instruments. Aristotle furthers says, 'That some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.' According to him, 'the one practising obedience, the other exercising the authority and lordship which nature intended them to have, the abuse of this authority is injurious to both.' Aristotle's argument was that 'slaves are born as slaves and rulers are born as rulers.' By nature one is inferior and the other is superior. This was exactly the argument of the Brahmins, who believed that God created men unequal and hence each one should strictly follow varnadharma. Buddha did not believe that inequalities are natural, but that the solution to them lay in providing opportunities. Though Buddha accepted the fact that the 'army is needed for the protection of the country, slaves are to serve their masters', these were only tem-

porary functions which had to be fulfilled to run the state. For example, Buddha never said that slaves and soldiers had no right to enter the sangha after retirement; they did have this right. His order 'not to admit soldiers, officers, slaves and debtors' was very specific in that such people were excluded only so long as they answered to these descriptions. As we have discussed earlier, even this opinion Buddha seemed to have changed after the death of Bimbisara. What is striking in the case of Buddha is that he never debarred Brahmins, to whose practices he was opposed right from the beginning, from entering the sangha.

Aristotle had a well-developed contempt even for the artisan classes. He says, 'The laziest are shepherds, who lead an idle life, and get their subsistence without trouble from the animals, their flocks having to wander from place to place in search of pasture, they are compelled to follow them, cultivating a sort of living farm.'[50] This is a very irrational understanding of the role of artisan classes. Buddha never treated artisans as Aristotle did. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were born later than Buddha, and they lived in different socioeconomic situations (Buddha in an ancient agrarian economy, the Greek thinkers in a city-state) the Buddha's understanding of class questions appears to have been far more rational than that of ancient Western thinkers.

Of course, on the question of caste, his understanding and the way he wanted to resolve the contradictions among differing castes was unique. He made consistent attempts to desacralize the caste institution. Given the brahminical privileging of caste-based varnadharma, he went ahead in opposing the very essence of Brahminism. He not merely preached anti-caste principles but put those principles into practice in sangha life, which expressed his creative political ideology in clear terms.

At the same time the inherent limitations of Buddha need to be understood. The class in which he was born; and the classes to which he was lending support, naturally forced him to disallow entry to slaves and debtors. Yet, working against these limitations there is a progressive intention. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, Buddha was arguing for humanitarian treatment of the Sudra class. He opposed brahminical tyranny. Thus, Buddha was the first political thinker who struck a balance between production and social equality and between democracy and communal property.

NOTES

1. Though the division of society into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra classes is described as varna (meaning 'colour') division by ancient and modern Hindu scholars, this division was based more on occupation than on the colour of the skin, as we see today. Many modern historians, starting with D. D. Kosambi, have studied this aspect of social history and are generally in agreement that the so-called varna division of ancient India is nothing but class division. See Kosambi's articles on caste and class in India, 'On History and India' and 'On Society: Problems of Interpretation' (Mumbai: University of Bombay, 1985) pp. 127-133, also R. S. Sharma, *Sudras* and *Material Culture*, also R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 1-21, pp. 312-33 where he compares the four ancient classes with those in England.
2. Sharma, *Sudras*. See pp. 48-52 where Sharma says the Sudras were not supposed to possess any taxable property. By the time of Buddha this situation appears to have changed.
3. One major problem that arises in adopting such a definition is that of whether those Sudras who are rich and powerful in modern India can be defined as part of the exploited class of Sudras. There is a vast difference in the position of Sudras in modern and ancient India. In ancient India the Sudra upper castes like the Reddys, Velemas, Patels, Thakurs, Khammas and so on, did not hold the positions they do today. Then they hardly had economic power, much less political and educational power.
4. Though the practice is not uniform, in the majority of Indian states a similar pattern exists. Among the innumerable Sudra castes one caste is considered superior to another, with the untouchables at the rock bottom of the hierarchy.
5. Some writers like Ambedkar treated untouchables as *panchamas*. In my view even that is not a useful analysis. Some South Indian writers treat the caste system as part of the Aryan /Dravidian question. I also do not agree with this view.
6. In his English translation *Ordinance of Manu* (from the Sanskrit) Arthur Coke Burnell uses the word 'caste' only to indicate classes but he rightly entitled the chapter 'The Mixed Castes and Classes: Procedure in Time of Need'. He also said, 'The Kshatriya caste does not prosper without the Brahmin caste; the Brahmin caste does not

flourish without the Kshatriya caste; but when the Brahmin and Kshatriya castes are united they flourish both here and hereafter.' The term 'prosper' in my view refers to economic exploitation. Manu's formulation 'Gaining wealth and tending cattle' to describe the ideal aims of the Vaisyas indicates that his laws were formulated at a time when they were just transforming themselves from farmers to traders. See *Ordinance of Manu* (New Delhi: Oriental Book Reprint Corporation, 1971), pp. 301, 302.

7. Ibid., p. 309. Manu states that 'thus Sudras may get divided into fifteen castes'.
8. Ibid.,pp. 311, 312 fn. The translation at some places used the words 'should be' in brackets but for the sake of readability I have omitted the brackets.
9. B. P. Sinha, *Readings in Kautilya's Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1976), pp. 132, 133.
10. Sinha seems to have used the word 'Aryan' as an equivalent to the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya combine. But this is a disputable usage, as class and caste distinction in India was never like colour distinction in Europe or America. The Whites and the African Americans in America, the African Blacks and the European White people in South Africa were distinguished solely by their colour. In India Brahmins are as dark as the untouchables are. There is no anthropological evidence in North India to prove the colour or racial theory of caste.
11. Ibid., pp. 134, 165-167. This fixation of position continues even today. The Yadavas consider themselves to be superior to toddy tappers, who consider themselves superior to washermen, who look down on barbers, who consider themselves higher placed than untouchables and so on.
12. According to Majumdar the distinguishing feature of the period was the struggle for ascendancy between the Kshatriyas and Brahmins. See Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 343.
13. Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, p. 8. This narration comes in the process of Buddha's explanation of the division of labour.
14. *Tevigga Sutta* (The Maha Silam), SBE, vol. 11, pp. 196, 197-200.
15. *Digha Nikaya*, pp. 122, 197.
16. See *Tevigga Sutta*, SBE, vol. 11, pp.192-195.
17. *Majjhima Nikaya*, p. 147. Quoted in *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan*, ed. William Theodore De Bary (New York: Vintage Books,

1972), pp. 49-50.

18. Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 121. In this footnote Sharma provides the Pali version also.
19. *Digha Nikaya, Kutadanta Sutta*, pp. 104-105.
20. See Chapters 2 and 3, this volume. Also see Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 121.
21. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 463.
22. See Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, pp. 40-41, where is narrated the winning over of Uravilla Kasyapa and Gaya Kasyapa who had thousand followers with them, all Brahmins.
23. R. S. Sharma says that the brahminical attitude towards traders as known from *Dharmasastras* was not sympathetic. The liberal donations of Ananthapindika and other lay merchant millionaires to Buddha and his order can be better appreciated if we bear in mind the brahminical attitude to the trade. See *Material Culture*, pp. 123-124.
24. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables: Who Are They?* (Shravasti: Bharatiya Buddha Shiksha Parishad, 1977), p. 99.
25. Nalinaksha Dutt discusses the Brahmin's position before and after they degenerated. He observes, 'The ancient sages were ascetics. They exercised self control avoiding the five pleasures of the senses, their wealth consisted not of cattle, gold, or grains, but of purity and learning. They lived on food collected at the door of the faithful and used the bed and clothes offered to them reverentially by the well-to-do. They performed sacrifices with clarified butter or oil, which they collected by begging, and they never killed any cows in sacrifice. In course of time, however, they began to covet king's riches, splendour and objects of pleasure, such as women adorned with ornaments. With an eye to these gains, they approached kings, persuaded them to celebrate aswamedha, purusamedha and vajapeya and received as fees from them gold, women, chariots, horses, cows, beds and clothes. They persuaded kings to celebrate sacrifices by offering cows, land, gold and grain etc.' See *Early Monastic Buddhism* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1971), p. 3.
26. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 63, 64., where he quotes the *Rattapalasuttana* in the *Majjhima Nikaya*.
27. *Digha Nikaya*, p. 125.
28. The contradictions among the ruling classes, though, force them to vie with each other, but when the working class, the slaves, the artisans and the emerging peasantry revolt against them the ruling

classes unite. For theoretical understanding of contradictions see Mao Zedong, 'On Contradictions,' *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), pp. 311-345, and also see Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 242, where he discusses the bitter struggle between democratic republics and imperialist states in Ancient India.

29. *Chullavaga*, Ninth Khandaka, p. 304. One of the remarkable methods that the Buddha adopted to explain his philosophical propositions is to draw parallels from nature.
30. Upholders of the brahminical ideologies spread the rumour that if Sudras touched, dined or married with upper caste persons, they would be punished in hell or reborn as donkeys, dogs or as diseased persons. Such propaganda destroyed people's confidence.
31. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 152-153.
32. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, p. 460, quoting Rhys Davids.
33. Fick, *Social Organisation*, p. 33. The author quotes from *Tittira Jataka*, p. 217.
34. The *Theragatha* is a collection of opinions and poems of bhikkhus. See *Theragatha*, tr. Mrs Rhys Davids as *The Psalms of the Early Buddhists* (London: Pali Text Society, 1948).
35. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 157. See the footnote. However, Oldenberg says that he was not aware of any instance in which a Chandala was admitted into the sangha. I think that given the nature of the work and the social placement of Sunita he could have been an untouchable. This aspect needs to be probed further.
36. See Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, where he quoted Manu as saying 'If a person touches a Buddhist or follower of Panchupat, Lokayataka, Nastika, and Mahapataka he should purify himself by a bath.' *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 7, p. 315.
37. Rockhill, *Buddha*, p.144.
38. Ibid., pp. 55, 86, 87.
39. See Bapat, ed., *2500 Years of Buddhism*, p. 31. It is this first council which settled the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. Of the three councils which were held to draw upon the canonical texts and the creed in their pure form, the first council is the most important.
40. See Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, pp. 105-106. There was a general feeling in ancient days, which Buddha seems to share, that slaves indulge in slandering and malice.
41. *Mahavagga*, p. 196, 199.

42. See Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, pp. 464, 466. He translates the analysis of Rahul Sankrityayana from Hindi. It may also be remembered that King Bimbisara, many rich merchants and the wealthy courtesan Amrapali were all supporters of Buddha.
43. See Sharma, *Material Culture*, pp. 116, 121, 125, 173 and also Rockhill, *Life of Buddha*, p. 106, where it is mentioned that Buddha ordered the kings to treat the slaves who join the sangha as equals.
44. Sabine, *History*, pp. 19-21.
45. Wood and Wood say, 'The bulk of the free population was a fairly homogeneous class of craftsmen, traders, peasants and labourers.' See Wood and Wood, *Class, Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*, pp. 21, 44.
46. Nersesyants, *Ancient Greece*, p. 70.
47. T. A. Sinclair, *A History of Greek Political Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 149.
48. Upali and Sunita are two good examples not only of participation but also of political leadership.
49. See Sinclair, *Greek Political Thought*, pp. 151, 152, where he states that it is the character that determines the ruler's virtue. But the principle is confined only to the two ruling groups.
50. Aristotle, *Politics. pp. 1131, 1136.*

8

WOMEN

THERE IS A NEED to make a brief statement about the significance of studying the perspective of every political thinker on the question of women. The feminist critique of political philosophy, as with regard to all other subjects, holds that inequality between men and women is as major an issue as class, caste, and state in every society. The views of political thinkers must, therefore, be studied from a gender perspective in order to understand social relations in their entirety. In her major work *Women in Western Political Thought*, Susan Moller Okin says, 'No one has yet examined systematically the treatment of women in the classic works of political philosophy—those works in which great thinkers throughout history have revealed to us their thoughts about the political and social life of the human race.' It is important to understand that social change is dependent on changing all hitherto unequal relations among human beings and half of the human race consists of women who are living an unequal life. As Moller Okin rightly says, the fact that women have gained formal citizenship, but have in no other respect achieved equality with men, is enough reason to devote sufficient space to understand every thinker's views about women in their historical context.[1] For a long time the position of women--their unequal and subordinate existence—was perceived as a 'private domain', hence political scientists took little interest in studying the views of both male and female thinkers on women. But the modern feminist schools have broken this myth with one major theoretical postulation that 'the personal is political' and there is no sphere where the politics of power do not operate. In other words there are no private domains; all are public and hence political domains.

In the Indian context the need to examine closely the views of ancient and modern political thinkers on the question of women is greater because the brahminical system has widened the gap between men and women by institutionalizing practices like *sati*, widowhood, child marriage and so on. Not surprisingly these practices are as ancient as Buddha, Kautilya and Manu. Hence I think there is a greater need to examine Buddha's political views on women in comparison with ancient Hindu thinkers. Though not many modern historians and political scientists have written about the position of women in ancient India, Altekar wrote a full-length book on this subject. But in a book of 450 pages he spared only 5 pages to discuss women in Buddhism and Jainism.[2] This certainly did not do justice to Buddha. As the views of the Hindu thinkers like Manu, Kautilya and Vatsyayana are far more widely known than those of Buddha we need to examine his theories here in much more detail.

The Background

By the time Buddha began to discourse on his ideology and establish the sangha, Indian women were passing through dark times. The Indus Valley culture of equality had been reduced to oblivion, and its urban luxuries disappeared. After this the Rig Vedic brahminical society was established in which women lost all their social and political rights. It appears that in the beginning women had the right to perform rituals along with men and to recite the Vedic mantras, but as time passed, their position deteriorated through the ages of the *Upa-vedas* and the *Upanishads*. During this period polygamy seems to have become the common practice and the patriarchal structures of family and society overthrew all their socio-political rights.[3]

In the *Satapatha Brahmana* we are told that a wife should eat after her husband has finished, and a wife who does not answer her husband back even under great provocation is praiseworthy. From then, the situation gradually deteriorated. By the time of the composition of the *Grihya Sutras* family structure had become very rigid.[4] Not only during menstruation but also at normal times women were kept away from religious rituals. Along with this, another change occurred in burial practices: in burning the

corpses of married persons, the son's role assumed enormous significance. With this change the women's prime task in Aryan culture became that of producing male offspring. Though polygamy was in vogue at the beginning of the Buddhist movement, monogamy seems to have been emerging. In ancient Indian literature we come across Buddha and Rama having been married to only one woman.[5]

Unlike in the West where the emergence of monogamy was supposed to have brought some security to women in contrast with polygamy, in India because of the brahminical theories of *swarga* and moksha through male offspring, monogamy seems to have made the women's condition more miserable.[6] It is in this background that we have to examine Buddha's views on women. But before we analyse what Buddha actually said and practised in relation to women, it is necessary to review the positions of Manu, Kautilya and Vatsyayana on the rights and duties of women.[7] Though these three thinkers did not write about women in the same period, three of them may be said to be ancient and they represent the post-Vedic brahminical mind.

Manu, Kautilya and Vatsyayana on Women

According to Manu, a woman should 'in her childhood be under the control of her father, in her youth under the control of her husband, if her husband is dead she should be under the control of her son. All old women have to be under the control of their sons.' Irrespective of age a woman was not supposed to act on her own will even in her house; she must always be guided by men. Thus, Manu deprived women of their basic political rights even at home. Forbidden to decide anything for herself, she was to be completely deprived of her initiative. He strictly prohibits separation of females from the father in childhood, the husband after marriage and the son in old age. If a woman flouted this law, according to him, society should condemn her, and the sovereign should punish her.

Not only that, even if the husband is of bad conduct, debauched or suffering from a contagious disease the wife must always worship him like a god. For women, according to Manu, there was no separate sacrifice, nor vow nor even fast—if a woman obeyed

her husband, she was exalted in heaven. Thus, she was deprived of all religious rights. Since religion was the most important social institution at that point, denial of the right to religion in essence meant she was denied all social rights.

Manu not only conditioned women to be incapable of living without marriage and without the support of a man, he also imposed monogamy on them. 'She must be till death, intent chaste [*sic*] following the best law which is the rule of wives of a single husband.' This, in other words, means that a husband is granted the right of possessing many wives but polyandry was strictly banned. He issued a moral dictum that a woman who was unfaithful to her husband would be born a jackal, would ferment with disease and so on. Further, in Manu's view these rules were not to be left to the moral and religious virtue of women: he made their enforcement binding on the king. If women did not follow these laws they should be punished severely. For example, 'if a woman, made insolent by her family, or by her own parents, should prove false to her husband, the king should have her devoured by dogs, in some much frequented place.'[8] If this was what Manu said, Kautilya made his legal mandates much more rigorous.

While Kautilya assigned a particular role to women in statecraft, he divided them into two sections. As he had realized that the greatest danger to the state was coming from the harem itself, he assigned spying duties to women who were *ganikas* and were not supposed to marry. Thus he legalized prostitution which was linked to espionage. These ganikas were employed in the security forces, harem, royal courts and so on.[9] The other section of women, with whom he was more concerned, was married women and their position and behaviour. According to him, every married woman was to be kept strictly under control and constant surveillance.

Though in this respect Kautilya appears to have been more liberal than Manu, it is not really so. His absolute monarchical state was entrusted with the authority to supervise every activity of women in the household. Women's position, therefore, seems to have deteriorated further. A marriage contracted in accordance with dharma could not be dissolved.[10] Kautilya sanctioned *kanyasulaka* (bride price) which, of course, pushed commercial and

trade relations into the marriage system. Though Kautilya allowed divorces, he also granted absolute rights to the husband over his wife as long as she was living with him. The right of physical punishment of their wives was conceded to men. According to him, refractory women could be brought to a sense of their marital duties by administering three blows with a cane or rope on the palm of the hand, or on the hip. He gave enormous powers to the state to punish and fine them if they did not behave according to *Arthashastra* law. If a woman gambled, or drank liquor she would have to pay three panas. If she went out, even if her husband was inside the house, she would have to pay 12 panas. If a man and woman made signs to each other, the woman alone was to be fined 20 panas. If a woman held conversations in suspicious places, whipping might be substituted for fines.[11] Thus Kautilya did not consider the home a private place, but one where the state could intervene for every small violation of patriarchal-brahminical law, even within the four walls. Like Manu he also did not grant social and political rights to married women.

With Vatsyayana the Hindu view of women took a new turn. Women were, according to him, of two types—the ganikas who were to provide pleasures to men having learnt the sixty-four arts of lovemaking and the wives whose main duty was to produce male offspring. In his view every *nagarika* (civilized man) had a right to have a harem of his own and the wives could be disciplined by very rigid rules. Vatsyayana reduced the position of women to mere toys in the hands of men by prescribing at length what a ganika should do to keep a customer happy. He gave a detailed list of things that a citizen should possess: the decorated rooms and equipment for feasts and festivals where the women could be used for amusement. In Vatsyayana's view, women had no place in politics and state affairs.[12]

Thus these Hindu thinkers provided a theoretical framework for the enslavement of women within the framework of the monogamous family. They used politics to privatize women's lives. Thus chastity, prostitution, marriage and every institutional arrangement was used to reduce the position of woman to that of a slave. Buddha's understanding of women's rights and their status has to be viewed in the background of these Hindu theories, institutions and ideological positions of the ancient period.

Buddha on Women

A. S. Altekar takes a very interesting ideological position with regard to the brahminical and Buddhist stands on women. According to him, the reason for women not participating in Vedic sacrifices was that the practice of sacrifice had become complicated; it now needed a study of minute details and hence was assigned to male substitutes in the age of the *Brahmanas*. Discussing Buddhist theory and practice he says, 'When discipline became slack and unworthy persons began to be admitted into monasteries and nunneries the tone of moral life deteriorated.' It appears that Altekar comes to a very biased conclusion with regard to Buddhist nunneries and their moral life in contrast with Hindu ideology and practice.[13]

With all his limitations and personal ambivalences about women, Buddha can be credited with five significant achievements: (*i*) he recognized the political right of women to join the sangha; (*ii*) he forced the sangha to recognize women's right to be leaders; (*iii*) against the dominant Hindu view Buddha held that a women can develop her own personality and individuality independent of any male support; *(iv)* he broke the myth of family and the importance of producing male children to attain salvation; and (*v*) he was the first to recognize the need for women's education and political initiative. We shall examine these five innovations one by one, studying how Buddha and his sangha handled these issues and in the process we shall analyse the strength and weakness of the Buddha's understanding.

Admission to Women

Perhaps the most crucial decision that Buddha had to take in his lifetime was with regard to the question of admitting women into the sangha. Like any other individual, he learnt and evolved his understanding of issues in the process of his personal struggle with his own mental make-up and the entrenched value system that conditioned his own thinking. This struggle comes out very clearly in his debate with Ananda over the admission of women. Of all the ancient sources, Buddhist literature alone does not hide the fact that women themselves took the initiative to join the

sangha.[14] The sangha system responded to the demands of contemporary women positively.

Though the admission of Maha Prajapati is a focal point for students of Buddhism, there are a number of smaller debates that occurred before Buddha opened admission to women, which must have influenced Buddha and Ananda. For example, the *Dulva* mentions a conversation between a wife and her husband before women were admitted into the sangha. One day a person called Sankya Mahanaman was in a jubilant mood after having heard Buddha speak. His wife was struck by his enthusiasm and asked him the reason. He told her about Buddha and his doctrine, and said that he was their saviour. But she said, 'He is the saviour of the men, *but not of women* [emphasis added].'Say not so,' her husband replied, 'His mercy extends to all creation.' And he took her to the place where Buddha was sitting. King Suddhodana did not permit women to approach Buddha and hear his discourse, but on hearing that Mahanaman's wife was going to listen to Buddha, five hundred other women also arrived. When Maha Prajapati intervened, they were allowed to go and hear Buddha and he taught them his dhamma.[15] That was his first step: of teaching, but not ordaining, women. Even before he took it, many like the wife of Mahanaman must have questioned why a new school and ideology like Buddhism failed, like the old, to give equal treatment to women.[16] In other words, Buddha's position as corrective and alternative to orthodox Hinduism compelled him to reverse the Hindu dispensation for women also.

The second significant encounter was that of Buddha with Princess Ratnavali who sent a letter through a group of merchants, asking him to teach her the dhamma. Buddha in turn sent her a portrait on which he had written the three refuges, the five prohibitions, the twelve *nidanas* and also what was the truth, what was not the truth and the eight-fold path. What is more important is that the last sentence Buddha is said to have written to her was, 'Arise. Commence a new life.'[17] This indicated that he had decided to give a call to women who were willing to rise in defence of their own self-respect. Thus he must have been willing to go some way towards meeting the demands from the women of his time in the face of brahminical repression.

The third encounter was with Maha Prajapati, and this time it

was specifically to do with women's admission into the sangha. It is interesting to note how Maha Prajapati put forth her demand for admission. She said 'It would be well, Lord, if women *should be allowed to renounce their homes* [emphasis added] and enter the homeless state under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.' Had it not been for the general counter-culture that Buddhism was creating against Brahminism, such a demand by women to be permitted to renounce the home would have been impossible. Hindu asceticism did not provide any scope for women to renounce household life. Buddha was, like everyone else, brought up in a patriarchal culture and could not immediately think of admitting women. He said, 'Enough, O Gautami, let it not please thee that women should be allowed to do so.' She put her request to him thrice and got the same reply each time. She mourned and wept but did not give up hope.

Buddha went from Kapilavattu to Vesali, and Maha Prajapati followed him there. Now she was determined: she cut off her hair and put on orange coloured robes. This time she did not go alone, but with other women of the Sakya clan. Knowing Buddha's stand, this time she approached Ananda who was more sympathetic to the rights of women than Buddha himself. According to the *Chullavagga* description, her feet were swollen, she was sorrowful and in tears when she appealed to Ananda, who then took up the cause, saying, 'It were well, Lord, if women were to have permission granted to them to do so as she [Maha Prajapati] desires.' But Gautama gave the same reply he had given to Maha Prajapati. Ananda pleaded thrice but to no purpose. Then he decided to question the basic premise of Buddha's position. He asked, 'Are women capable of realizing the fruit of conversion or of the second path, or the third path, or of arahantship?'[18] He further said, 'Had not he declared that women too were capable of attaining nirvana?'[19] Buddha then agreed that 'they were capable'.

Then how, Ananda wanted to know, could he deny that right to one who had nourished him and gave him milk, and on the death of his mother suckled him at her own breast? He demanded that Maha Prajapati should be admitted then and there. Buddha then agreed on the condition that she should accept the Eight Rules. He made these eight rules very rigid in the hope that Maha

Prajapati would refuse to join on these conditions. They were: (*i*) A bhikkhuni, however senior she may be by age and experience, should always salute a bhikkhu; (*ii*) a bhikkhuni should not spend the rainy season in a district in which there is no bhikkhu; (*iii*) every half month the bhikkhunis should take a lesson from a male bhikkhu; (*iv*) after the rainy season is over every bhikkhuni has to confess to a joint meeting of bhikkhunis and bhikkhus what has been seen, what has been heard, and what has been suspected; (*v*) a bhikkhuni who is guilty of a serious offence shall be punished in a joint meeting; (*vi*) a bhikkhuni has to go through two years' probation and will get full membership only when a joint meeting approves it; (*vii*) under no circumstances should a bhikkhuni revile or abuse a bhikkhu; (*viii*) officially no bhikkhuni shall be granted the right to admonish a bhikkhu but a bhikkhu can admonish a bhikkhuni.[20]

According to Buddha these rules should be honoured and observed throughout the bhikkhunis' lives and they were never to be transgressed. It appears that Buddha stipulated these conditions to scare women away from joining sangha. However, for the women of that period, beside the Grihya Sutra rules which crippled their household life, these were relatively simple, hence Maha Prajapati accepted them at once. When Ananda conveyed the news of her acceptance to Buddha his reaction is worth noting. He said 'Ananda, if women had not received permission to go out from the household life and enter the homeless state, the sangha's pure law would have lasted for a thousand years, but because of their admission the system may last only for five hundred years.' He compares women's admission with a milder disease in a field of rice and finally says that like building a reservoir to arrest the waters, in anticipation he had laid down these eight rules to see that women did not overpass their limits.[21]

Buddha's personal ambiguity should be understood in the context of his times. By admitting women into the sangha he was taking a revolutionary step. Society by then was looking at women as forces of disturbance; Hindu thought and practice portrayed them only as pleasure-seeking beings. Most of the bhikkhus who joined the sangha were also influenced by the socio-political values around them. Above all his own upbringing, and the patriarchal culture he inhabited, conditioned him.

With all the limitations and conditions the sangha imposed on women, their admission nevertheless liberated them from household drudgery. The women who were admitted seem to have felt relieved of the bonds of family and household life.

How the women felt after joining the sangha is expressed in some of the songs of the *Therigatha*. For example, a bhikkhuni by the name of Sumangala says:

> O Woman well set free! How free I am,
> How wonderfully free from kitchen drudgery,
> Free from the harsh grip of hunger,
> And from empty cooking pots,
> Free too of that unscrupulous man,
> The weaver of sunshades.
> Calm now and serene I am,
> All lust and hatred purged.
> To the shades of the spreading trees I go
> And contemplate my happiness.[22]

Sumangala makes it clear that though she lives under a tree, she feels freed from drudgery and from the brutal husband who respected her less than the shade of a tree. After joining the sangha she was free from all such bondage.

Mathika's song is also a clear indication of the liberty that the women got on joining the sangha. She says:

> Though I be suffering and weak, and all
> My youthful spring be gone, yet have I come,
> Leaning upon my staff, and climb aloft
> The mountain peak.
> My little bowl o'erturned, so sit I here,
> Upon the rock, and over my spirit sweeps
> The breath of liberty I win, I win
> The triple lore, the Buddha's will be done.[23]

It is obvious that Mathika entered the sangha in old age, yet she was still prepared to face all the hardships of climbing mountains and so on. The liberty that she got through sangha life was worth undergoing all these tribulations. The songs of Vasantha and

other women indicate that they were tormented with household affairs. When their children died they had to undergo tortures; joining the sangha provided an escape route.[24]

Bhikkhunis as Leaders

With all the limitations that Buddha imposed on female sangha members there are indications that women were allowed to take up the leadership position in sangha life. In *Chullavagga* we have already come across the example of Mettiya who complained of sexual harrassment by the bhikkhu Mallian at the instance of her male followers. This was proved to be false in the sangha assembly and she was expelled. Thereafter the bhikkhus who had instigated her confessed and her position seems to have been restored.[25] According to Altekar several inscriptions show that senior nuns had female disciples and novices, and used to possess influence sufficient to collect funds necessary for the maintenance of their establishments.[26]

The bhikkhunis were granted the right of moving resolutions in the sangha assembly with regard to the admission of women. Buddha said, 'Let a learned and competent bhikkhuni lay the following resolution before the sangha. This person desires to receive the upasampada initiation from [a bhikkhuni] and she has been instructed by me. If it seems meet to the sangha let me question [her] as touching the disqualifications. The detailed prescription of qualifications for admission is also listed.

The initiator then moves the following resolution: '[The candidate] desires to receive the upasampada, [a bhikkhuni] being her proposer. The sangha confers the upasampada upon [her]: whosoever agrees thereto let her keep silence; whosoever agrees not thereto let her speak.' This would be repeated twice and voted upon. If the candidate was admitted, her proposer was to go to the bhikkhu assembly and say, 'Sirs, [the candidate] who, being desirous of receiving the upasampada initiation from [the proposing bhikkhuni] has received it on the one side (bhikkhuni sangha) and has there been declared free [from the disqualifications], does hereby ask the sangha for the upasampada', the rest of the procedure was the same. What is important is that the women had been given the right to lead and initiate the upasampada for other

women. The democratic system that the sangha adopted extended to women also; they had a right to vote like the male sangha members, though it must also be noted that the initiation of a male candidate did not require the bhikkhunis' sanction.

As in the case of the bhikkhus, the senior-most bhikkhunis used to get places of honour at meals, in the assembly and so on. Buddha himself mandated this arrangement, saying, 'I prescribe, O bhikkhus, that the senior eight bhikkhunis shall take their seats according to seniority, and the rest as they happen to come in.' It is true that the question of seniority and its attendant rituals had overtones of hierarchy, but it also allowed the sangha to acquire the necessary skills and stability to run and maintain the institution. Buddha was conscious of the fact that women should be able to lead a self-confident life. He was very particular that the bhikkhunis should become learned and competent, reportedly saying, 'I allow you to confer the upasampada initiation by sending a learned and competent bhikkhuni as a messenger.' He also said 'that they be instructed by learned and competent bhikkhunis' and so on. This insistence of his indicates his interest in developing women as leaders.[27]

Personality and Individuality of Women

Several women contemporaries of Buddha seem to have treated the establishment of the sangha as a new opportunity. Both within the family and outside, women were granted no personality and individuality of their own; with the establishment of the sangha and the admission of women into them there was now an opportunity for women to improve their status. Though relatively speaking the number of women who joined these sanghas was small, the fact that the writings of 73 women were included in the *Gatha* records, shows that the bhikkhunis inspired vast sections of women.[28] If the number of women who flocked round Buddha to listen to his teaching at Nyagrodha is an indication, then hundreds and thousands of women were influenced by his ideology. According to Altekar, heiresses, refusing tempting marriage offers, joined the Buddhist preaching armies.[29] By all accounts more women joined Buddhism than Jainism, showing the relative popularity of the former.

Buddhism provided respectability to many women who were condemned by society and also by their own families. Ishidasi's example is a case in point. She was married to three men one after the other, but even the third husband, who was a wandering mendicant, left her. After this she decided that living respectably was impossible in Hindu family life. She left her father's family and joined the sangha, where it appears she lived happily. The case of Bhadda Kundalakesa is also an important one. She was married to Sarthaka, who was a criminal. He feigned love for her but after the marriage attempted to murder her and take away her jewellery. Realizing her danger Bhadda pretended to concede his demand, saying, 'My lord, these jewels are all yours; have them, but why do you want to murder me?' Sarthaka told her he was determined to kill her after robbing her, as she might spread reports about him or go to the law. Then she pretended to embrace him for the last time, pushed him over a precipice, and killed him. After this she feared Hindu society would not accept her; so she threw all the jewellery in a heap on his dead body and joined the Buddhist sangha. There she found respect and dignity. A number of other women like Sumangala, Mathika, Vasanti, Sumedha, Utpalavarna became very well known in the sangha and also in the wider world. Several prostitutes who were looked down upon by society joined the sangha and acquired a respectable place. Arthakasi of Kasi, Padmavati of Ujjain and Ambapali (Amrapali) of Vesali were noted women who came from this background and enjoyed a high reputation.[30]

Buddha personally instructed the bhikkhunis to teach the novices so that they might improve their knowledge, saying, 'Let them measure the shadow, tell what season and what date it is, tell her what part of the day it is, tell her the whole formula, and tell the bhikkhunis to teach her what are the three things allowed and what are the eight things interdicted.'[31]

Breaking the Myth of Family and Marriage

Buddha did not prohibit admission to pregnant women. However, he impressed upon the men and women in the sangha that sexual intercourse was completely banned in sangha life. At the same time Buddha believed that women also can attain knowl-

edge and through knowledge also nirvana. In his times marriage was not merely seen as a man and woman living together in order to produce offspring. Marriage and family were seen as spiritual necessities and social obligations. According to Altekar, society (that is, Hindu society) reacted sharply to a maiden's joining the Buddhist and Jain orders, primarily because these maidens were avoiding marriage. Those women who joined the sangha were seen as immoral. According to Altekar, 'Some of these women were unable to live up to their [Hindu women's] ideals, and their lapses were furiously commented upon by the public.'[32] The *Chullavagga* mentions several instances of public reaction. For example, if the bhikkhunis wore long girdles with arranged fringes, the people murmured and complained to Buddha, who forbade this to avert public wrath. Though Buddha was also conditioned by the surrounding male chauvinist ethos, the fact remains that women were given the opportunity to choose between arhatship and marriage, and this itself was a major blow to the very concept of marriage. Throughout history we hardly come across movements which provide women with such an opportunity. The steps that Buddha had taken were unique in that respect.

There were examples where a newly ordained bhikkhuni would realize that she was pregnant and the question came up as to what such pregnant women should do. One such woman asked Buddha, 'How shall I now conduct myself towards this child?' Buddha, called for an assembly meeting and declared, 'I allow her to bring it up till it should have attained years of discretion.' Then the woman said she needed someone's support during the period of pregnancy and childcare. Buddha then said, 'I allow the bhikkhunis to depute any one bhikkhuni and give her [as] a companion to that [pregnant] bhikkhuni.' And it was decided to entrust this to a willing bhikkhuni. This example indicates that pregnancy and childbirth were not seen as immoral acts, and the debate was not dragged into questions of how a pregnant woman had been admitted into the sangha. The debate was also not diverted into taking punitive action against women who joined the sangha while with child.

There was the case of a bhikkhuni being asked to dispose of the foetus of a woman who became pregnant with a paramour when her husband was on a journey, described in Chapter 6.[33] The law

prohibiting this was passed after a discussion in the sangha assembly, but nowhere do we have evidence to indicate that any derogatory comments were made about the extramarital pregnancy of the woman. The fact that prostitutes were admitted into the sangha and Buddha himself maintained very cordial relations with Ambapali, a rich courtesan, was a clear indication of their sympathetic understanding of these issues.[34]

As far as Buddhist morality was concerned, prostitution and extra marital sexual relationships were not issues of chastity as the Hindu moralists maintained. In fact, for Buddha, family and marriage were hurdles in the process of attaining freedom. According to him, political and spiritual freedoms were more important, towards which both men and women had to strive. Buddha realized that the main source of selfishness was the family, and hence, though he admitted his son Rahula into the sangha, he remained totally indifferent to the parental bond.[35] He was willing to admit his wife Yasodhara into the sangha as a bhikkhuni, but Yasodhara seems to have insisted on wifehood and as a result she was never admitted. As far as he was concerned, the only right of Yasodhara's which he was prepared to grant was that which she held in common with all other women, namely, that of joining the sangha. If this attitude is contrasted with that of Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, Buddha emerges as a breaker of the myth of chastity and the concept of *pativratyam*.[36] Commenting on Buddha's concept of women, Thomas said, 'Neither the Buddha nor his followers considered marriage as an inviolable sacrament. It was something of the economic and social contract or arrangement and either partner was generally free to leave the home and take to the religious life.'

Women's Education and Their Political Initiative

We have established that Buddha allowed political freedom to women and in the process provided them political education as a part of sangha life. Apart from this, Buddha seemed to have given them the scope for literary and cultural development. One of the few pieces of evidence that shows this is the collection of songs by senior bhikkhunis. These songs, as they come to us, contain some autobiographical information also; in other words they are stories

told by the women themselves, containing much literary and political information with which to reconstruct the political life of women. Take for example, the following song of Vasantha:

Now all my sorrows are hewn down, cast out,
Uprooted, brought to utter end,
In that I now can grasp and understand
The base on which my miseries were built.

If this song comes out so beautifully in translation, its rhythmic sense and beauty must have been much greater in Pali. It also reflects the personal tone of the author; its political content is remarkable. Is it possible that the *theris* could compose such songs without being educated? Even in K. R. Norman's view the *Therigatha* gives a clear picture of their talent and political acumen. When they compare their physical appearance in their youth and old age their expression combines poetic and aesthetic talent. Ambapali, for example, says:

My hair was black, like the colour of bees,
With curly ends, because of old age it is like bark fibre of hemp.
Full of flowers my head was fragrant like a perfumed box;
Now because of old age it smells like dog's fur.[37]

Subha, a smith's daughter, says, 'Having left the group of relatives, the slaves and servants, the rich fields and villages and delightful and pleasant possessions, I went forth, abandoning no small wealth.' In another stanza referring to herself she says, 'This one is a freed slave, without debt, a bhikkhuni with developed faculties unfettered from all ties, her task done, without *asavas*.'[38] In this story there is a clear expression of her political mind because, in spite of all her riches, Subha did not feel free and her faculties remained underdeveloped when she lived in Hindu family life, a fact she now acknowledges. But after she joined the sangha her faculties were developed and then she was freed from all ties. This kind of self-assessment is not possible unless the person concerned is highly conscious, and this kind of consciousness could not have developed unless there was a systematic

educative process at work in sangha life, one which nurtured the individual personality.

One comes across several instances where sangha members showed political initiative. We have already discussed the initiative of women who demanded admission into the sangha. Within the sangha also they continued to exercise such initiative on significant questions. The *Chullavagga* mentions a very important incident: 'Now at that time a certain bhikkhuni, when on her death bed, said, "After I am gone, let my set of necessaries belong to the sangha." Then the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis disputed it, saying "It belongs to us; it should belong to us."'

They put this dispute before Buddha, who in turn puts it before the sangha assembly, where he says, 'If, O bhikkhus, a bhikkhuni or a novice under training to become one, when on her deathbed, should say, "After I am gone, let my set of necessaries belong to the sangha," then it is the bhikkhuni sangha that it belongs to; the bhikkhu sangha is not the owner thereof. If a bhikkhu, or a novice under training to become one, when on his deathbed, should say: "After I am gone, let my set of necessaries become the property of the sangha" then it is the bhikkhu sangha that it belongs to; the bhikkhuni sangha is not the owner thereof.'[39] Before this rule was passed, 'The set of robes and the bowl are to be assigned by the sangha to those that waited on the sick.'[40] This is a very important change, but the point to be noted here is that the initiative for it came from a woman, and that Buddha responded to it positively. One of the political weapons of patriarchal culture is that it completely snubs the initiative of women both at home and outside, but this example indicates that Buddha's response deviates from the patriarchal norm—more particularly from Hindu practice.

The Limitations of Buddha

In her book Uma Chakravarti in a brief reference to the attitude of Buddha towards women says, 'The early Buddhist want of sympathy for women is not a unique phenomenon, but rather one that was typical of monastic sentiment all over the world.' Even in that brief reference she comes to the conclusion that 'apart from Anand's espousal of their cause, the general tone of Buddhist

literature is antagonistic to women.'[41] While Uma Chakravarti's assessment of Ananda's role is to a large extent correct, her general conclusions about the Buddhist attitude is based on insufficient examination of the available literature. Her conclusions are based on incorrect methodology as she measures Buddha's attitude towards women against modern values. But the contradictions in the Buddhist idea of, and práctice towards, women have to be seen in contrast with contemporary Hindu ideas and practice.

However, my examination of sangha life in the previous sections indicates that Buddha departed radically from Hindu practice in admitting women to the sangha, in allowing them to take political initiative, and in breaking the myth of family and marriage. This does not mean that there were no limitations in Buddha's conception. In fact his understanding and practice with regard to the resolution of human problems was self-contradictory on several occasions, for instance, in his enigmatic comment to Ananda after women were admitted: 'If, Ananda, women had not received permission to go out from the household life and enter the homeless state the law would have survived for a thousand years. But since women have received permission, the good law will now stand fast for only five hundred years.'[42] This seems to indicate that he felt women should be seen as an obstruction to moral progress. Again, when Ananda asked him how the bhikkhus should conduct themselves before women, Buddha advised him, 'Do not see womankind.' The argumentative Ananda pursued the point. 'But if we see women, what are we to do?' 'Abstain from speech,' replied the Buddha. 'But if they speak to us, what are we to do?' asked Ananda. 'Keep wide awake,' was Buddha's warning.[43] But these two statements should be understood in their proper context. The first statement was made after he had taken the momentous step of opening a bhikkhuni sangha. The second statement should be understood as part of his rigid views about sexual relationships. They cannot be taken literally because his own practice goes against them—for instance, the respect he showed for Ambapali, a courtesan. Once, for example, when Buddha was at Vesali, Ambapali visited him along with a great number of women. Buddha seeing her coming cautioned the bhikkhus, 'Ambapali is coming, be mindful, wise and thoughtful.' When Ambapali came to him, she bowed down at his feet and sat

down to one side. The Blessed One instructed and gladdened her by his words, after which she invited him and the bhikkhus to eat with her the next day. Buddha accepted by remaining silent.[44] There are several instances where Buddha met women, talked to them and also taught them, both within the sangha and outside. He attended their assemblies. Seen in this background his statements like 'Do not see womankind' do not make much sense. However, it must be remembered that Buddha was against sexual intercourse in the sangha. His attitude to sex was a sharp reaction to the Hindu indulgence in it.[45]

In sangha practice, it comes out clearly that Buddha and the sanghas were very much conditioned by patriarchal ideology. For example, one of the conditions he imposed on women was, 'A bhikkhuni even if she is of a hundred years standing, shall make salutation to, shall rise up in the presence of, shall bow down before, and shall perform all proper duties towards a bhikkhu.' Yet another example of male dominance is expressed through the rule of exhortation. One such protocol is as follows: 'The bhikkhuni sangha salutes the feet of the bhikkhu sangha, and requests permission to come for the purpose of the exhortation being held,' 'May that be granted,' they say, 'to the bhikkhuni sangha by the bhikkhu sangha.'[46] The former rule subordinates bhikkhunis individually to bhikkhus and the latter subordinates the bhikkhuni sangha collectively to the bhikkhu sangha. This is a clear indication that the freedom that the sangha allowed women was only relative, not absolute. We have also seen that while undergoing upasampada ordination every woman had to go to the assembly of bhikkhus for approval, as well as getting the approval of the bhikkhunis.[47]

Buddha not only laid down rules for the bhikkhuni sangha which subordinated women to men but advised several women as to how they should behave in their families, if they decided to live a married life. In the *Anguttara Nikaya*, we come across advice that Buddha gave to girls of marriageable age.

'To whatever husbands, your parents shall give you in marriage—anxious for your good, seeming your happiness—further, you will rise up early, be the last to retire, be willing workers, order all things sweetly and speak affectionately. Train yourself thus, girls.' He further says, 'And in this way also, girls, you will

know, revere esteem and respect all whom your husband reveres whether mother, father, recluse or Brahmin and, on their arrival will offer seat and water. Train yourselves thus, girls.' According to him, they should look after relatives well, assess the needs of sick and prepare food accordingly. They should protect the property that male members of the family earn.[48] Buddha insists that parents have to be looked after well.

His advice to a daughter-in-law called Sujata is noteworthy. Having come from a rich family she was treating her in-laws and husband as inferiors. Buddha told her that there were seven kinds of wives, and when she asked him to elucidate, he explained, 'One resembles a murderer, the second a robber, the third a mistress, the fourth a mother, the fifth a sister, the sixth a friend and the seventh a servant.' He then asked, 'Which of these are you?' Sujaṭa asked him for more explanation, and it is said that Buddha then listed for her the duties of a good wife. After this Sujata is said to have turned good and declared, 'From now on, I will be unto my husband a wife who resembles a servant,' implying that Buddha had held up the last type as an ideal.[49] But the sixth type is the paradigm on which he should have insisted. The sixth relationship resembles the pair marriage that Morgan and Engels advocated. But Buddha does not seem to have insisted on that kind of equality because he, too, was conditioned by patriarchal relations.

These limitations should also be seen in the light of his positive political steps which must have had greater implications for family structure. It is important to note what Horner, a woman writer who was president of the Pali Text Society, said: 'One cannot say therefore that nuns have been neglected in early Buddhist literature.' She further added 'It is not possible to keep off women in early Buddhist literature, to keep separate these component parts of the four-fold community that grew up around Buddha, because they were not separate in life.' Because of his progressive role, Buddha had been accused of being a breaker of homes, of turning wives into widows and rendering mothers childless.[50] More than this, he was so seen because he opened sangha admission to women.[51] In general women in Buddha's time were living in two distinct cultural settings: the Hindu milieu where hierarchy was thoroughly maintained, and the environment built by Buddhist ideological teaching and sangha practice.

Thus, in spite of its conditioning by patriarchal ideology, in many other respects the Buddhist school liberated women. It helped in reducing the suppression of women socially and politically.

Comparison of Buddha with Plato and Aristotle

If what has survived of the opinions of Greek thinkers about woman is any indication many ancient political thinkers talked about women. But in modern political thought only Rousseau, J. S. Mill, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels commented on women's position and their rights and duties.[52] Other than them there are a host of thinkers in the Western tradition who did not say anything about women; one can even say they ignored this question altogether.[53] The first and foremost positive aspect of Buddha, when compared to many Western political philosophers, is that he did not ignore the women question as inconsequential.

However, it appears that the contradictions that we have unearthed in Buddha's thinking seem to reflect those of his contemporary world itself. A progressive and speculative philosopher like Plato also expresses himself in a contradictory way on women. On the one hand, Plato provided provision for equal education and equal right to become philosopher queens to women belonging to the upper class, and on the other he believed that the female sex was created from the souls of the most wicked and irrational men.[54] Plato also believed in abolishing the family and taking away the responsibility of rearing children from women. This was linked to abolition of private property among the ruling class. Plato saw the family as a source of selfishness and corruption. In the Platonic scheme women were granted equal rights to education, which was given the most important role in building society. But that equality was attainable only by the ruling class.[55]

As suggested by the material that we have examined in the preceding pages, Buddha did not restrict the extension of rights only to a particular class of women as Plato did. He treated women as an oppressed class like any other Sudra caste in India. Courtesans, destitute women, oppressed women, all were provided with the right to be educated and to attain nirvana. In Plato's scheme the women of the working class had to carry the

whole burden of maintaining the size of the population while ruling class women underwent a programme of selective mating to produce the best possible offspring.[56] Furthermore, ruling class women were relieved of family and kitchen drudgery as all the ruling class ate in state dining halls. Buddhist women who joined the sangha, were to have a similar opportunity of being relieved of kitchen drudgery. They were provided with the opportunity of procuring food through alms and also of eating in collective dining halls.[57] In the *Chullavagga* we come across accounts of quarrels in the dining halls providing us with enough evidence that the sangha did not rely completely on alms and had their own kitchens.[58]

From *The Republic* to *The Laws* Plato became more realistic and his class bias also grew slightly blunted. Accordingly to Glenn Morrow, it was certainly Plato's expressed intention to give women a more equal status under the law. Susan Moller concludes that Plato's divorce laws, unlike the marriage laws, treat women considerably more equitably than did the comparable laws of contemporary Athens. This is true of Buddha also; the code of conduct that he imposed on the sangha women and also the laws he prescribed for married women treat them with more equity than the Hindu laws. Plato in *The Laws* proposes a more moderate communal life than was suggested in *The Republic*. He asks even married women to take their meals in common dining halls.[59] No doubt as one advances in age and experience one realizes that the goals one sets for oneself must be realizable; and one finds that one must go on relaxing one's own principles. In the case of Buddha, he relaxed many of his rigid laws, even in the case of women, allowing them to join the sangha and making provision for bringing up children within it.[60] By the time of his death the sangha system had grown considerably bigger because of the concessions he granted in admitting women to the sangha.

Like Buddha, Plato also thought that by nature women were weak and inferior. Plato says, 'There is no practice of a city's governance which belongs to woman because she is woman or to a man because he is man; but the natures are scattered alike among both animals; and women participate according to nature in all practices, and man in all, but in all of them woman is weaker than man.'[61] Buddha's stress on loyalty, obedience to husband and

parents was a result of the feeling that women were weaker than men, but even in this respect there was no consistency in Buddha's conception.[62] There were several instances where Buddha placed mothers on a superior footing than fathers. However, in spite of similarities and dissimilarities between Buddha and Plato, one thing is clear: both of them were concerned about women's rights and took some steps to liberate women from the clutches of their contemporary societies.

Though Aristotle said much less about women than Buddha and Plato, he seems to represent more reactionary patriarchal thinking, asserting that 'women are naturally inferior to men, and that they are therefore naturally ruled by them.'[63] Aristotle assigns this inferior role to women irrespective of their class background; in fact he treats women and slaves as classes that were born to be ruled. According to him, 'the female and the slave are naturally distinguished from one another. Nature makes nothing in a spirit of stint, as the smiths do when they make the Delphic Knife to serve a number of purposes. She makes each separate thing for a separate end; and she does so because each instrument has the finest finish when it serves a single purpose and not a variety of purposes.' In Aristotle's view men are meant for a separate purpose and women are meant for a separate purpose. Women's main function, according to Aristotle, is reproduction. The male via his semen always provides the soul of the offspring, while the female via her menstrual discharge provides the matter.[64] His argument is quite implicit that soul is superior to matter and thus man is superior to woman.

If we see Buddha's understanding of women in the light of Aristotle's, Buddha emerges as far more progressive. Buddha did not believe that the only function of women was reproduction; on the contrary, he held that there is nothing that women could not do. According to him women are capable of arahantship, of leadership and finally of nirvana. To Buddha, unlike Aristotle, reproduction and homemaking are not the sole duties of women; to him reproduction is as much a duty of man as of woman. For Aristotle the family is a necessary basis for social life, whereas for Buddha a higher degree of social life becomes possible with communal ownership and communal living.[65] The family for Buddha is a source of greed and selfishness. If Aristotle exhibits

the male chauvinist attitude of master against slaves, Buddha and Plato exhibit only the limitations of patriarchal culture with an attempt to break patriarchal slave relations wherever possible. So far as the woman question is concerned Buddha and Plato were revolutionaries of their times, while Manu, Kautilya and Aristotle were reactionary thinkers who were willing to perpetuate inequalities between men and men on the one hand and men and women on the other.[66] If Buddha and Plato were forerunners of Marx and Engels, they were also forerunners of the feminist thinkers of the modern world who laid the foundation for women's political equality.

NOTES

1. Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (London: Virago, 1980) pp. 1, 4. In this book the author examines the political and ideological views of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and J. S. Mill on women from a feminist perspective. In the last chapter she also examines 'Functionalism, Feminism and the Family'. In the introductory chapter the author, at some length, examines the significance of studying every political thinker's views on women so as to attain total equality between men and women and of the human race itself.
2. Altekar titles his book *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1962). In it he discusses the position of women from prehistoric times to the present day.
3. See P. Thomas, *Indian Women Through the Ages: A Historical Survey of the Position of Women and the Institution of Marriage and Family in India from Remote Antiquity to the Present* (Mumbai: Asia Publishing House, 1964). Thomas held the opinion that compared to the sophisticated women of the Indus cities, Aryan women of that time were crude, hardy camp dwellers, who could neither withstand nor appreciate such urban luxuries, p. 7. Kosambi describes at length the 'Great Baths' in the Mohenjodaro and Harappa cultures where free union of men and women used to take place. See *Historical Outline*, pp. 66-68. Also see Altekar, *Position of Women*, pp. 9-10. The author shows that some sections of the Rig Veda were even authored by women
4. Thomas, *Indian Women*, p. 58. The *Grihya Sutras* indicate that religion for the Indo-Aryan householder had become a daily ritual with a

round of ceremonies to be performed at every stage in life's progress from conception till death; p. 61.

5. According to modern historians the *Ramayana* was compiled much later and was based on earlier stories. According to Sharma the 'Balakanda' and the 'Uttarakanda' of the *Ramayana* seem to belong to the Gupta period. See *Material Culture*, p. 236. The *Mahabharata* presents a mixed picture of polyandry, polygamy and monogamy.
6. See Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, where he argues that monogamy was desired by women over polygamy as a system of civilization. Of course exploitative relations were established within the family. See Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 230.
7. While Manu codified laws with regard to the position of women in his *Manu Smriti*, Kautilya talked about women's treatment in practical jurisprudence in *Arthashastra*. Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* throws light on many social attitudes to women.
8. *Manu's Ordinances*, trans. Burnell, pp. 130-132, 135, 237. Polyandry as depicted in the *Mahabharata* was (and is) in vogue in tribal communities though in the eyes of the law it came to be treated as unlawful.
9. Thomas, *Indian Women*, pp. 70-72.
10. Somnath Dhar, *Kautilya's Arthashastra.*, p. 150.
11. Thomas, *Indian Women*, pp. 72, 75.
12. Vatsyayana, *Kama Sutra*, ed. J.S. Bright (New Delhi: Varma Brothers, 1975), pp. 34-40.
13. Altekar, *Position of Women*, pp. 202, 210. Altekar's assumption is that women are not capable of understanding complicated questions, issues and practices.
14. *Chullavagga*, pp. 320-326. The *Buddha Suttas* state that Maha Prajapati herself approached Buddha at Kapilavatthu asking him to open the sangha to women.
15. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 58. Also see p. 5. The story tells us that as Mahanaman's wife was not allowed to enter while wearing jewellery, she gave her jewels to her maid and sent her away. But the girl was so depressed at not being allowed to hear Buddha that she committed suicide on the way.
16. It is important to note that until Maha Prajapati's audience took place we do not come across any mention of women's names in the annals. Perhaps this must have been due to the Vedic practice of not identifying women by their names.

17. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 59. Here there is also an indication that writing was in vogue in India at that time, and that Buddha was familiar with it.
18. *Chullavagga*, pp. 320-322. It is important to note that but for the democratic atmosphere and culture that Buddhism was trying to create it would have been impossible for Ananda to build up the argument as he did in order to admit women into the sangha.
19. Thomas, *Indian Women*, p. 82.
20. These eight rules were made specially for women and indicate that they were treated as second grade citizens within the sangha.
21. *Chullavagga*, pp. 320-322, 323-324, 126. After this debate and internal struggle it appears that Maha Prajapati's case was put before the sangha Assembly for ordination and from then on women were admitted into the sangha.
22. Thomas, *Indian Women*, pp. 88, 89.
23. Translated by Uma Chakravarti and Kumkum Roy, in *Women Writing in India*, ed. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, vol 1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 69.
24. See *Therigatha*, trans. K. R. Norman, vol. 11 (London: Pali Text Society, 1971), pp. 11-51.
25. *Chullavagga*, pp. 9, 353. The Mettiya incident has been discussed at length in Chapter 6.
26. Altekar, *Position of Women*, p. 20.
27. *Chullavagga*, pp. 15, 349, 351, 354-355, 361. To join, a woman should have reached 20 years of age, be free from debts, not be in the king's service; should obtain the permission of her parents if living, be duly provided with robes and alms bowl and recommended by an ordained bhikkhuni.
28. Thomas, *Indian Women*, p. 84
29. Altekar, *Position of Women*, p. 210.
30. *Therigatha*, trans. Norman, pp. 41-441.
31. *Chullavagga*, p. 362.
32. Altekar says that 'by 300 B.C. marriage came to be regarded as obligatory for girls whereas the *Jataka* stories indicate that by the time of Buddha such views got strengthened.' See Altekar, *Position of Women*, p. 32. Even in modern times, women who join political parties, particularly non-traditional ones like the communists and socialists, are also seen as immoral and accused of having no respect for family life. Women's joining the sangha was seen similarly in the

ancient period.

33. *Chullavagga*, pp. 341, 345, 346, 364.
34. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, pp. 128-129.
35. According to Thomas, Rahula did not occupy an important position in the sangha. See Thomas, *Indian Women*, p. 82.
36. Rama insisted that his wife should be his true follower and a chaste *pativrata*. Sita was asked to enter fire to test her chastity and this story is too well known.
37. Thomas, *Indian Women*, pp. 82, 88- 89. Also see p. 8.
38. K. R. Norman edited these poems of the *Theris* and *Theras* which were translated from Pali by Mrs. Rhys Davids, with detailed notes and comments, see his book, *Therigatha*, vol. 11, pp. 28, 35-37.
39. These necessary things include the eight things over which every member of the Buddhist order had rights—the three robes, the alms bowl, razor, needle, griddle and water strainer. See *Chullavagga*, pp. 344.
40. Ibid. Rhys Davids says that such a rule was laid down in the *Mahavagga*, viii, 27.
41. Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, p. 32.
42. *Chullavagga*, p. 325.
43. Quoted in Thomas, *Indian Women*, p. 83.
44. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, pp. 128-129.
45. See Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* which gives a detailed description of the sex life of the nagarika, pp. 34-40. Vatsyayana's description goes to show that the nagarika's indulgence degenerates into vulgarity.
46. *Chullavagga*, pp.322-323, 388.
47. Thomas, *Indian Women*, p. 90.
48. *Chullavagga*, p. 354.
49. Thomas, *Indian Women*, pp. 92-93.
50. I. B. Horner, *Women in Early Buddhist Literature* (Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1961), pp. 3, 11.
51. See Altekar who says, 'When discipline became slack and unwilling persons began to be admitted into monasteries the tone of moral life deteriorated.' See *The Position of Women*, p. 210.
52. Susan Moller Okin recognizes only Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Mill as political thinkers who discussed women. Other feminist political philosophers and sociologists include Marx and Engels.
53. St. Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Hegel—all these thinkers are being studied as political philosophers

proper. All of them did not say much about women.

54. Plato, *Republic,* p. 132. See also Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought,* p. 15.
55. Sabine, *History,* p. 66.
56. Ibid. See also Okin, who characterizes the Platonic scheme as one of philosopher queens and private wives, *Women in Western Political Thought,* p. 28.
57. Procuring food as alms in ancient India cannot be equated with begging because the visiting of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to citizens' residences and their taking food from them was considered a privilege.
58. *Chullavagga,* pp. 220-22.
59. Glenn Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City,* quoted in Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought,* p. 46.
60. *Chullavagga,* p. 364.
61. Plato's *Republic,* quoted in Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought,* p. 59.
62. Thomas, *Indian Women,* p. 90.
63. Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought,* p. 79.
64. Aristotle, *Politics,* quoted in Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought,* p. 81, 82.
65. Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought, p. 85.*
66. Manu and Kautilya perpetuated inequalities between men and men by separating them into castes, and between men and women by making women subordinate, slavish partners of men. Aristotle did the same by supporting slavery and the inequalities of women.

CONCLUSION

IN THIS BOOK I have attempted to study Gautama Buddha as a political thinker, and Buddhism as a school that emerged to challenge contemporary Hindu society and its hegemonic ideology of Brahminism. This book is coming out at a time when the land where Buddha was born, developed his thought and experimented with his system, is being constructed as a 'Hindu nation' with Brahminism as its centrality. At the same time Buddhism has been regaining ground as a religion of Dalits since Ambedkar embraced it in 1956. The tension between Hinduism and Buddhism may grow in the future as these two religions represent two different social forces. Globally speaking Buddhism has become a major religion conditioning the consciousness of millions of Asians. The Buddhist religion, as a religion, has not solved the problems or removed the inequalities among people. But for that we cannot hold Buddha responsible.

Interestingly, in many countries Buddha became an idol of worship.[1] In the spiritual domain Buddha's status is that of a prophet, like Jesus Christ or Mohammed. This book shows him in a different light altogether—that of a political thinker, and a forerunner to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius and many others. Present-day global economic, political and social systems have come to institutionalize capitalism, democracy, pluralism and socialism. As these systems repeatedly suffer crises while transformative discourses are attempted again and again, people need to draw lessons from ancient thinkers. So far only the Greek thinkers—Socrates, Plato and Aristotle—have been projected as the authentic speculative ancient thinkers who served as ideological links between the contemplative past and the energetic pre-

sent. I have shown in this book that in the sphere of speculative thought Buddha becomes the forerunner of all known great political thinkers of the world and his speculative energies are as strong as those of any other Western political philosopher of the ancient world.

The most important conclusion of my study, perhaps, is that the European scholars who claimed that the East had no speculative philosophy of its own, that Indian political ideas were one-dimensional and had been subsumed in religion without posing a threat to the dominant polytheist religious dogma, are only replaying Western biases vis-à-vis the East. The East can reconstruct itself by examining its own contending schools of thought in a creative manner and in this book I have made the first attempt to reconstruct Buddha as a great thinker of the East, whom the West cannot ignore in future. Buddha was the most reflective thinker of his time, of both West and East. He not only theorized on the state, democracy, rights and duties, caste and class and women's equality, but tried to transform his ideas into praxis. His praxis involved in itself the awakening of conscience or 'consciousness raising' of the people around him and also the establishment of alternative structures. Hardly any Western thinker of his time (or in ancient India as a whole) has done this. His methodology was materialist and dialectical and, much against the claims of Eurocentric scholars, it was a secular philosophy which posed a challenge to the axiological viewpoint of *Samana* Brahminism. Buddha was the first major thinker to challenge Brahminism as it began to construct anti-humanitarian socio-spiritual systems. He realized that sections of society were going to face spiritual fascism where one group or one caste would establish its hegemony over the rest of society by claiming the right of intercession between people and the divine.[2] By systematically subverting the authority of Brahmins as a caste, he established a social system where humanity could represent itself by negating the power and the control of the other worldliness. Since Brahminism was constructing a spiritual process that would make the common people serve brahminical interests by identifying themselves as *'Brahmin hitaya, Brahmin sukhaya'* (wellwishers and pleasers of Brahmins), Buddha reframed the whole spiritual and material process to embody a new world-view:

'bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya' (wellwishers and pleasers of the many).[3] By negating Brahminism he shifted the emphasis from class (the Brahmin caste) to mass. It is here that Buddha goes against the class political ethic of ancient Greek thinkers, just as he goes against the hierarchical ethics of Eastern thinkers like Confucius, Kautilya and Manu.

My study also disproves the nationalist Hindu scholars' view that Buddha's thought was part of Hindu religious speculation. On the contrary, Buddhist ideology emerged in opposition to Hindu axiology and the whole political philosophy he built up was to confront the politics of Hindu varnadharma. Buddha's negation of varnadharma and dandaniti were to have serious implications for Indian and global thought. His philosophy stood in opposition not only to that constructed in all the Vedas, *Upanishads* and *Dharmashastras* of India but also the speculative thought constructed in the West to serve the interests of the master classes but not of slaves.

My survey of pre-Buddhist conditions indicates that the emerging imperial state, the wars that ravaged the people, the emerging institution of private property and the ongoing division of society into castes and classes, the subjugation of women and particularly the deteriorating economic conditions in northern India, created favourable conditions for the emergence of new political and ideological schools. Brahminism, as an official state ideological and ritualistic school, faced a challenge from the materialists, mainly from those of the Kshatriya caste.[4] Slightly earlier than Buddha's time, the Charvakas emerged from diverse class backgrounds but did not really succeed in providing an alternative to Brahminism. By picking up threads from the materialist viewpoint of the Charvakas and the Jainism of Vardhamana Mahavira, Buddha's ideology was woven anew. While Mahavira and the Jain school failed to catch the imagination of the ordinary people, perhaps because of their extreme non-violence, Buddhism emerged as a pragmatic school and influenced the people. It became a mass movement because quite successfully it mediated between spiritualism, materialism and also collectivism. Brahminism had an inbuilt process by which to construct a notion of caste in people's minds—self-salvation. Institutions such as *sanyas* or asceticism allowed individual votaries to attain salva-

tion while the caste hierarchy itself prevented any mass mobilization of the people, even any centred around religious activity. Brahminism was engaged in formulating the dual strategy of proclaiming *tyaga* or sacrifice to be the essence of spiritual life while advocating the accumulation of wealth through *dana* and *dakshina*, gifts and donations, in order to maintain life in comfort without participating in productive work. Buddha discovered an alternative in this process through collectivity. *'Sangham sharanam gachhami, Buddham sharanam gachhami, dhammam sharanam gachhami'* were the three slogans around which Buddha built his mass movement.[5]

Buddha's early upbringing and childhood influences show that the root of his renunciation was the need to search for political, ideological and organizational alternatives to Samana Brahminism, to the imperial state, to growing misery, to moribund agriculture and to wasteful rituals and yajnas. Buddha discovered his Middle Path as a consequence of this search, giving it its name in the context of emerging extremist ideologies of the left and right. It was intended to forge a middle ground between the ultra-right ritualistic superstitious Hindu Brahmin-dominated society and the ultra-left materialistic rational schools of *Lokayata-vada*. Thus it seems to have tremendous potential to change systems positively and in a definite direction. The world has suffered and is continuing to suffer great loss of life due to extremism of many kinds—religious, political and social.

By learning a great lesson from the Buddhist Middle Path mode of struggle Ambedkar achieved remarkable success in changing the position of Dalitbahujans in India. By carefully reading Buddha Ambedkar moved away from the Hindu, Christian, Islamic and Marxist modes of system-building and chose the Buddhist mode as most suitable for this country. The enemy of productivity, creativity and equality of spiritual, social, economic and political life processes—Brahminism—was put on the defensive once the Buddhist ideology had constructed an equalitarian sangha system. After the Buddhist revolution forced the *pashu bali* (animal sacrifice) centred beef eaters to see the necessity of becoming a pro-agrarian productive social force, they went to the other extreme and became vegetarians. Furthermore, once they had accomplished this change, they projected that diet as the only

'pure' and spiritual food regime. Such cultural and historical permutations must be examined in the light of Buddhist experience.

Buddha created the sangha system as an organizational and institutional alternative to Brahminism and the imperial state. The Middle Path was grounded in his great philosophical Eight-Fold Path, which was significant in its emphasis on austerity. This austerity was partly aimed at countering the wasteful consumption that was taking place in the ritualistic yajna culture of superstition; it was essentially aimed at achieving social equality. We have come to associate notions of equality with Western thought, but ancient Western philosophy had no truck with such ideals; the Western valorization of equality came much later. This political biography of Buddha shows that the desire for equality among the Buddhists was very strong. The experiment he carried out was unparalleled, even today—Buddha sought to bring about equality in a social collectivity, the sangha, with a humanitarian purpose.

The embryonic state that he sought to establish was supposed to work to achieve equality. This equality in his view was not to be imposed on an individual or group of individuals or indeed over society as a whole. It should evolve within sangha practice itself. Buddha seems to have understood that the desire to consume more and more material wealth and the desire to control others or exercise power are socially constructed desires. Once the sangha structures allow the equalitarian democratic process the sangha itself disempowers forces that seek to imbue some members with control. The caste structure, on the contrary, is designed to be self-perpetuating and thus to perpetuate the hegemony that, as the self-proclaimed summum bonum of this structure, has a vested interest in it. This strategy worked very well for Brahminism except for the short period when Buddhism was in the ascendant in India. Buddha deliberately turned the hegemonic code on its head by advocating the theory of ahimsa, of shaving the head and face, being prepared to soil one's hands in productive work, mixing with all castes by sharing their cooked food given as alms. By that time Brahmins had stopped accepting cooked food from Sudras and Chandalas; this barrier was merely intensified by the new Brahmin practice of vegetarianism.[6]

Brahminism had to adopt underhand methods to defeat Buddhism and reclaim its hegemonic space in the state and civil society. After Buddha's death pressures from within and without conspired to turn Buddhism into a religion. During the period of Ashoka around the third century CE it spread to other Asian countries and established itself as one of the leading religions of the world. But in India the Vedic Hindus retaliated. According to Ambedkar key Buddhist monks were killed so that further propagation of Buddhism should be weakened. All the Buddhist viharas were occupied by brahminical forces and Hindu idols installed in them, a tactic of which the Babri Masjid incident is the newest manifestation. By then (the fifth and sixth centuries CE) Buddhist institutions had accumulated considerable wealth, which added temptation to the religious animosity that ruined them.

In the process of killing Buddhism, Brahminism brought the whole caste system back with a vengeance as this hierarchy alone could preserve their hegemony for centuries. In modern India, though political democracy was adopted as a system imposed by the British, the upper caste Hindu mentality remained exclusivist. Furthermore, they were all too ready during the nationalist period to present their own deities, icons, rituals, folklore and religious symbols as representative of mainstream modern India. Once they had constructed their culture as *the* Indian culture, they implied that to lack adherence to that culture was to be unpatriotic. The gods and customs of Sudras, Dalits and Adivasis were thus marginalized and the cultural integrity of these groups attacked by Brahminist nationalists. The traces of Buddhist tradition still to be found among these groups were pushed further into the background. For example, vegetarianism was projected as the practice of most Indians, thus undermining the Sudra, Adivasi, Chandala and Buddhist traditions which were actually the composite food culture of India—meat, milk, vegetables and so on. Vedanta philosophy was projected as the foundation of Indian thought.

My study of Buddha's political thought shows that the Buddhist political, social and spiritual philosophy have nothing to do with Vedanta. The Vedanta which was projected as Indian nationalist philosophy did not operate outside the bounds of varna-

dharma but only within the sphere of brahminical metaphysics. The very names of Buddha's family starting with his own, Siddhartha (pure material), and his father's, Shuddhodana (pure rice) indicate that they come from an agrarian background which was closer to the Vaisya-Sudra culture of his period. This is the reason why Buddha never prescribed pure vegetarianism to his followers. He began a campaign to stop the killing of agrarian draft cattle but at the same time the sangha itself continued the composite food culture—meat, beef, pork, vegetables and so on. In conformity with this tradition, in all countries where Buddhism is the main religion the composite food culture exists and continues. Louis Dumont, the well-known French anthropologlist, said, 'Buddha refused to endorse the prohibition on eating meat and fish: it was enough that the animal was not killed for the monk, or was believed in good faith to be so.' He further adds, 'The Brahmin would have adopted vegetarianism so as not to be outdone by the renouncer [Buddha].'[7]

Vegetarian Vedantism's entry into our national discourse as the practice of mainstream India shows how false is brahminical nationalism. In the face of the fact that 85 percent of India's population were and are *mamsaharis* (the correct translation of which is 'meatarian') the Brahmins in charge of the nationalist project did not feel that they were projecting the self-image of a small minority into nationhood itself. Even academic socio-cultural studies like that of M. N. Srinivas cannot look beyond the division of society into purity and pollution camps: the Brahmins setting themselves up as 'pure' and constructing the Dalitbahujans as 'polluted'. These analyses fail to look at the culture and literature of the other as having identity and validity independently of the hegemonic culture.[8] The brahminical 'purity' and the Buddhist or present Dalitbahujan 'purity' have opposite meanings, as does 'pollution'.

In the fifty years after Independence the upper castes were able to consolidate their hold on society enormously. Caste, class and gender inequalities have provided enormous advantages to the brahminical patriarchal system. After the BJP came to power in 1999 in alliance with a number of political parties there has been a concerted effort to strengthen the caste hierarchy in the face of the reservation ideology that had begun to shake and weaken it.

In modern times when industrialization is coupled with conspicuous consumption and pollution of the environment, politics has become an instrument of consumerist decadence. In this situation studying the ideology behind Buddha's austerity produces fresh clues to finding a solution to our consumerist politics or political consumerism.

In modern India two thinkers—Ambedkar and Gandhi—were very much influenced by Buddha. However, they came to two different conclusions. While Gandhi decided that the solution of consumerism lies in avoiding industrialization itself, Ambedkar concluded that industrialization is a solution to poverty and the problem of consumerism can be overcome through equity and justice. A correct application of the Buddhist principle of austerity to modern industrialist society lies in the establishment of an equalitarian system without undermining industrialization. In other words, industries must become centres that meet human needs rather than profit-making centres. In post-Independence India the consumerist culture of the brahminical caste-class has acquired two important dimensions. Firstly, education has customarily been seen as the process of acquiring skills delinked from labour or vocation. The gathering of knowledge exists as an enterprise operating outside (or above) production; the *Brahmajnana* of the Brahmins has always existed and operated thus. The Buddhist knowledge system, on the other hand, was always integrated with agrarian production which Buddha characterized as 'producing two of one'. Secondly, Brahminism dehumanized the 'lesser' castes in direct proportion to their 'distance' from the Brahmins in the caste hierarchy. It did not relate to these castes in spiritual or even human terms; thus it did not perceive their poverty and hunger as human deprivation, or their oppression and suffering as human injustice and misery. Had Buddhism survived in India, perhaps the spiritual, social and cultural life of Indians would have been different.

Buddha's Eight-Fold Path—Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindedness and Right Rapture—seen with his strict control over individual ownership of property marked a way for equity and austerity. But Buddha never pleaded for arresting productive forces in the name of austerity. He believed in building

a system that helps productive forces to develop. His opposition to cattle slaughter in the yajnas and yogas was grounded in his perception of the need to promote the use of animal power in agriculture. His theory of non-violence—including the abandoning of animal sacrifice—was intended to strengthen productive forces. Seen in this light industrialization need not be done away with, but while encouraging its full release we should be able to establish an equalitarian system so that the negative aspects of industrialization can be overcome. As the practice of the Buddhist sangha suggests, equity itself is a balancing force.

But the Hindu religion, despite its nationalist rhetoric, failed even to grant its members equal rights in places of worship, so that irrespective of caste and gender people could officiate as priests, read mantras in their mother tongues and share the temple wealth and bounty as a common heritage.[9] In the name of Hindu nationalism, spiritual fascism came to be adopted as the key mode of society.[10] Under all the hype that Hinduism has attracted to itself in its self-proclaimed 'revival' in recent years, this remains unchanged: the centrality of caste to all mainstream Hindu discourse, and the lack of challenge from within Hinduism to the idea that Brahmins are the manifestations and agents of divinity on earth. Buddha's thought is a powerful weapon to fight spiritual fascism in whichever religion it operates and at whichever place it operates. In India the centre of that fascism lies within Hinduism, and in default of challenge from within, it must be challenged from without.

The most striking aspect of the findings of this study is Buddha's perception of the state and the origin of the state. Hindu thought provided us only with a most primitive divine origin theory that was designed rather to stop all argument than to further any understanding of politics. Buddha's imaginative parable of the shares of rice is a useful instrument to construct a picture of the ancient Indian state. Though the sangha was established as a model institution Buddha had a clear perception of the state and society that surrounded them. Hitherto political scientists have identified the social contract theory of the state as a product of the Renaissance and Reformation, which culminated in the growth of science, reason and the Enlightenment. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau were products of this socio-economic trans-

formation and transition from feudalism to capitalism. In other words, the Western contractualists were products of socio-political ferment in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But based on this study it is not a exaggeration to say that similar ferment was at work in India around the sixth century BCE when Buddha constructed his social contract theory of the origin of the state. His social contract theory, seen against the Hindu theory of the divine origin of the state, is grounded in his perception of pre-state society, a time when 'all was well with all'. Then 'ethereal bodies were free from every impurity with faculties unimpaired' but changed conditions such as increasing population and decreasing food resources forced the people to enter first into an agreement to recognize the institution of property. Subsequent to this the people made another contract to create an Authority or the State. Thus, the finest, the handsomest and the one who knows the law of the land was elected the ruler. The people also agreed to pay taxes for the maintenance of the state.

Buddha had his own vision of the democratic functioning of the state. He was a believer in tribal republicanism. He made every attempt to save the tribal democratic states from the onslaughts of imperial monarchical states; his efforts to save the Vajjians and his warnings to Ajatasatru not to attack them were a case in point. Secondly, the democratic procedure that the sangha adopted to assemble, debate, vote and decide on every major issue produced a treasure house of India's ancient democratic practice. The admission of individuals to the sangha, punishment to members or expulsion of members from the sangha and so on was decided by vote by the sangha assembly according to written rules and guidelines. The authoritarian monarchical system that emerged in the post-Ashoka period was a result of the Kautilyan mode of varnadharma state management whereby the king had no choice but to function against the ethics of Buddhist democracy and tribal republicanism. Kautilya assigned ministerial and civil service positions exclusively to Brahmins and made sure a strict varnadharmic code was imposed on them to protect Brahminism by all means. So long as the hegemony of brahminical forces was safeguarded corruption and other forms of immorality were justified. About corruption he said, 'Just as it is impossible not to taste honey or poison that one may find on the tip of one's tongue, so

it is impossible for one dealing with government funds not to taste.'[11] Thus, the morality of public institutions that Buddha built into his model sangha is entirely different from the morality that Hindu thinkers, whether Kautilya or Manu, built around the kingship or even around institutions like rishihood or the temples. Brahminical morality had no concept of public accountability, while in sangha morality it was one of the first principles.

Buddha's dhamma was clearly a means to establish a just society. While the ancient Hindu thinkers used dharma and danda to mean two sides of the same coin, Buddha repeatedly stressed the pre-eminence of dhamma alone. There was not much space for danda in Buddha's theory. For brahminical thinkers like Kautilya and Manu maintenance of varnadharma and strict adherence to caste rules were justice. Contrary to this the Buddhist justice was anti-varnadharma and anti-caste. For him everyone, irrespective of caste, creed and sex, had the right to association, the right to freedom of speech and expression. His justice was an embodiment of human freedom. According to him dharma based on union with Brahma was false dharma. In other words the Buddhist justice was a non-religious socio-political concept, which struck at the root of brahminical hegemony and the hierarchical division of society. The argument that ancient Indian political thinkers were more concerned with the art of governance and administration than with the philosophy of the state cannot be applied to Buddha, though it may hold true of Kautilya and Manu. Buddha on the other hand visualized an ideal state which aims at establishing a society based on equity, austerity and non-violence. The sangha was the epitome of such an ideal. Thus the state in Buddhist philosophical discourse arises out of human necessity and is a result of human rationality. That such rationality went against the brahminic caste-centred superstitious absolutism. The brahminic absolutism differed in some points from the Christian, which never took its theories about the Great Chain of Being to their logical conclusion. Buddha, however, stands far above all Divine Right theories.

The Buddhist concept of democracy flows from his concept of justice. In order to show a structural alternative to the imperial state system, Buddha established the sangha. Admission of members to the sangha was based on democratic principles, while

qualification for admission was based on the character of the individual seeking membership. Even that was decided by majority vote by the sangha members. The laws pertaining to the maintenance of discipline and decorum within the sangha were based on the principle of equality. One person one vote, and one vote one value was the sangha democratic and political principle. The Kautilyan state that came into operation in subsequent years destroyed this democratic ethic and caste-centred administration, the characteristics of which we can see in the present state as well.

The sangha democratic structures were embodiments of legislative, executive and judicial powers. Buddha functioned as one among equals. The sangha assemblies would regularly meet and enact the sangha laws, which were subject to constant modification and change according to the needs of the sangha. It was never a rigid system, almost like modern socialist law which constantly underwent change. The sangha system never depended on mere laws, as the sanghas believed in creating a democratic culture and democratic interpersonal relationships. Buddha believed that the sangha system should have its own administrative network. The maintenance of viharas, the maintenance of records, the proper accounting for money and grain collected as alms, and the commodities produced by collective production, was done within a well maintained administrative structure.

Yet another key aspect of Buddha's philosophy was the question of property. My study dispels the myth that Buddha was a sanyasi like the Hindu rishis; on the contrary, he was a system builder. Buddha's understanding of property reveals two important aspects. One: he and his sangha were strong propagators of the communal ownership of property. Though the sangha owned hardly any landed property, through the generosity of its patrons it accumulated vast amounts of non-landed mobile and immobile property. Buddha himself took the initiative in enacting the laws relating to regulation, distribution and maintenance of the sangha property. Two: the Buddhist perspective of communal ownership emanates from Buddha's conception of the division of labour. He sees nothing wrong with the division of labour as production needs special expertise in each field; the farmer, the teacher, the barber—each was as important as the other. But he was opposed to breaking up the functional divisions of society into immobile

social groups, just as he was against the degrading of productive labour. Buddha saw social relations from a materialist perspective combined with pragmatism. He saw a radical rupture between sacrificial spiritualism and the pragmatic existentialism of contemporary social forces. At a time when the state appeared to be acquiring land only to bestow benefits on the ruling class, Buddha seemed to have differentiated between social ownership of land and state (monarchical) ownership of it. He saw tribal communal landholding on the one hand, state ownership on the other, and preferred the former because it preserved equality while the latter destroyed it. He realized that the monarchical ownership of property was creating class rule.

While Buddha was opposed to both state and private property ownership, he seems to have preferred communal ownership of landed property by the people themselves. He seems to have realized that state ownership of property might also lead to authoritarianism. This is why he constructed a people's collective in the form of the sangha which combined the characteristics of civil society and the embryonic state. He attempted a balance between the rights and duties of citizens. If sangha practice was any indication, social, economic and political equality were the keys to social life, while austerity was the core concept. Food, clothes, furniture, every item that was available in the viharas was distributed on the principle of equality. Buddha made it a point to reduce needs to a bare minimum and commodities were distributed to meet the basic needs of the members. Contemporary life is increasingly torn between the unlimited desire to lead a 'good' life and the ever-increasing demands of that life. The conflict between materiality of life and the imbalance that material life produces in the social environment by pushing the dispossessed into a situation of nothingness—poverty, destitution, alienation—creates a spiritual conflict in one's own life. India has become a classic example where the rich live in world class comfort while their poor neighbours starve. The Hindu rich are additionally isolated by caste barriers, which absolve them from feeling guilt at the fate of 'lesser' castes, who exist in any case to serve them. It is here that Buddha's sangha way of life can redeem their morally empty lifestyles.

In our own times we have seen the socialist systems collapsing

because of inherent contradictions between the people's desire for rights and the attempt to control such desire through the dictatorial imposition of duties by the rulers in the name of proletarian dictatorship. The principle 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need' met with an irresolvable contradiction between rights and duties, and the socialist system faced a setback in Europe. But at the same time because of the Buddhist moral and ethical background the socialist system has survived in China, and Chinese socialism managed to produce a moral and ideological leader of Mao's stature. Though ancient in nature and small in size, the Buddhist sangha system seems to provide a clue to resolve this contradiction. There seems to be a ray of hope in sangha practice.

Buddha approached the question of duties by stressing equally the importance of rights in the sangha. It is important to balance between the rights and duties of the people and the rulers. Even in terms of consumption Buddha was one among equals. He was subject to the same duties and eligible to exercise the same rights as any other bhikkhu. The political decadence of any system starts with the leaders or rulers assuming themselves to be more equal than others. If present-day 'democracies' (in actual fact oligarchies) thrive on the principle of one individual or one class being more equal than others, socialist systems are collapsing under the contradiction between stated dogmas of equality and the unstated practice of rulers becoming a class unto themselves. In this situation of despair it is important to study the Buddhist understanding of property, rights and duties more seriously.

For the Buddhists, rights and duties were two sides of the same coin. The apparent stress on duties in the day-to-day practice of the sangha was a reaction to the all-pervasive cultural hegemony of the imperial state and society and to Hindu spiritualism which rendered that society irresponsible. The yajna and yoga culture dehumanized social relationships, while aggrandizement was the all-pervading aspect of dandaniti. All the Hindu gods were weapon-wielders and violence had reached its pinnacle. In this situation Buddha set himself the task of saving society from the culture of aggrandizement and violence. He believed in creating islands of alternative culture (the sanghas) amidst the Hindu hegemonic cultural sea. He was the only fighter who did not have

a weapon in his hands and yet wanted to fight the weapon-wielding culture of Hinduism. The creation of an alternative culture is possible only when the emphasis is on moral responsibilities and duties of both individuals and the system as a whole. This was one of the reasons why Buddha appears to have emphasized moral responsibilities in the form of moral duties. But such duties went hand in hand with moral rights. Thus the violent enemy was to be defeated by the non-violent methods of this alternative culture and way of life. The rights and duties of the sangha members revolved around this transformation of the value system itself.

Buddha was addressing, along with other universal questions, the India-specific question of caste. The Indian caste system is an outcome of the four-fold class system. The Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra classes emerged out of the division of labour and, because of the intervention of brahminical ritualistic ideology, these classes degenerated into castes. Buddha was the first Indian thinker to understand the negative role of the caste system. He himself was a product of the contradiction between degenerating Brahminism and self-assertive Kshatriya solidarity. That was a time when the Kshatriyas as a class were being marginalized, as Manu's statement that the 'Brahmin class/caste alone can subdue the Kshatriya class/caste' testifies. Buddha revolted against this process, and came to believe that the solution to aggressive Brahminism lay in uniting the Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra forces. Buddha was also the first Indian thinker to realize that the worst sufferers of the caste system were the Sudras. They were slaves, artisans, in a word they were the basic producers, but they were the people who were denied all rights. A section of Sudras were rendered untouchables; others were reduced to slavery, creating a hierarchical structure even among them so that they could never unite and revolt.

Buddha had decided to forge a united front of all those who were opposed to brahminical ritualism, imperial stateism and cultural hegemony of the ruling and priestly classes. Hence he decided to establish a bhikkhu and bhikkhuni sangha where caste division were to be obliterated. He was not so much against the class system, nor was he against Brahmins as people, as he was against Samana Brahminism. He was a supporter of the growing

mercantilism but at the same time opposed to slavery in the form in which it existed at the time. He not only admitted people of all castes into the sangha but created a leadership from all castes. Moggallana, a Brahmin, Ananda, a Kshatriya, and Upali, a barber, were encouraged to become leaders and did become the foremost intellectuals of the sangha. Devadatta, his cousin, who wanted to usurp the sangha leadership using dynastic connections (to Buddha), was completely marginalized in the sangha. Buddha who did not believe in nepotism cut Devadatta down to size.

Till today the riches or poverty, power or slavery, merit or demerit that one enjoys or exercises, suffers or subdues, is determined by the caste and family into which one is born. Caste decides the very substance of an individual's life. The under-development of Indian society, the abysmal poverty of large numbers of people and vulgar riches of the few, in fact, the absence of any real class struggle can be attributed to the caste system. Buddha gave the first blow to this system, yet, as Ambedkar rightly said, the brahminical counter-revolution defeated again and again the revolutions that occurred in the womb of Indian society. Buddhism was the first revolution, and the first to be so defeated.[12] Yet there are still important lessons to be drawn from it.

Social degeneration in the twentieth century seems to be much more than what it was during Buddha's time. A small measure of reservations for the Backward Classes and castes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes met bitter opposition from casteist upper castes in 1990. While Buddha was admitting Sudras and untouchables into the sangha and creating leaders and intellectuals from these castes, he must have faced stiff opposition from brahminical forces which were losing the ground under their feet, but the resistance could no have been as bitter as what we see today, otherwise he could not have done all that he did. We thought that growing capitalism and urbanization would reduce caste tensions but, to our horror, as industrialization and urbanization grew, the caste system took new forms. It continued to strengthen its hold because the Indian ruling class have always preserved their cultural hegemony, political control and economic dominance through the caste system. In this situation the destruction of caste seems to be the only method by which class

struggle will become possible in India. On this front Buddha seems to have lost to counter-revolutionary Brahminism more because of its cooptive methods than because of its success at destruction. His limited non-violence and his opposition to killing cattle were used to convert the brahminical forces to vegetarianism and he himself was coopted into one of the dasavataras, becoming merely a manifestation of Vishnu. Moreover Brahminism saw to it that caste survived and by medieval times it was forged into one of the worst instruments of suppression and oppression.

The last but most important aspect of Buddha's political philosophy consists of his views on women's rights. On this question in the early days of his Buddhahood he was as patriarchal as any other Hindu thinker, but the internal democratic structure of the sangha system changed his views greatly. After he realized that women must be treated as human beings, the first major blow that he struck against the Hindu patriarchal oppression of women was to admit them into the sangha. The Hindu perspective on women was expressed in the writings of Manu, Kautilya and Vatsyayana, for all of whom women were instruments in the hands of men to provide them pleasure and produce children in order to maintain the male descent of the family. Against this Hindu view, Buddha declared that women could attain nirvana. While the Hindu thinkers denied the right to education to women of all caste-classes, the Buddhist sangha gave them the freedom to read and write. Thus, the first generation of women intellectuals in India emerged from the Buddhist sangha. For example, Ambapali, Sumangala, Mathika, Ishidasi, Subha and many other women not only acquired the skills of composing songs but assumed enormous importance in sangha life. The bhikkhuni sangha encountered enormous problems because of the unequal treatment meted out to women. The male members of the sangha found it difficult to overcome the patriarchal culture around them, and this culture inevitable found its way into the sangha. Time and again Buddha made laws to overcome these problems. In a way, banning sexual intercourse was a curbing of a natural right, but a consensus seems to have emerged on this question among both men and women in the sangha. At a time when for women marriage and family life were seen as destiny itself, by discourag-

ing men and women from entering into married life Buddha attacked the myth of family and marriage. He attempted to encourage women to address sangha meetings, and allowed them to take the initiative in sangha activities.

This does not mean that Buddha can be said to have had no limitations. Some of his personal limitations and weaknesses were overcome because he was a part of the sangha system; the story of the opening of the bhikkhuni sangha shows this. Yet with regard to the question of women's equality the sangha system itself was operating under the enormous influence of gender distinctions. For example, while the bhikkhunis when compared with Hindu women were far closer to being free citizens and were liberated souls, within the sangha the bhikkhus had superior status. This only indicates that achieving women's equality requires the most bitter battle; a far more protracted one than that required to establish the equality of castes and classes. This is because any class of men treat women of their own class as subordinates and as objects of oppression and so do men of all castes. Buddha's sangha also operated within that patriarchal paradigm.

A word about the comparison of Buddha's thought with ancient Greek political thinkers. I certainly do not claim that I have done a meticulous job in this regard, since my emphasis was more on sketching out the political philosophy of Buddha in comparison with Hindu thinkers. I can only make a cautious statement here that Buddha in some respects like the theory of origin of the state and in transforming his speculative ideas into praxis is the forerunner of all Western thinkers. Nevertheless there is a lot of scope for further study in this field.

NOTES

1. Beautiful images of Buddha are available in many parts of India. Recently in Andhra Pradesh, a huge carved stone statue of Buddha was erected, and the site is rapidly becoming a tourist spot. Similar idols are common in Japan, China, Sri Lanka and many other countries where Buddhism is popular.

2. Kancha Ilaiah, 'Spiritual Fascism and Civil Society', *Deccan Chronicle*, February 15, 2000.
3. The slogan '*Bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya*' has become very popular among activists of Dalitbahujan parties in the recent past, as well as among neo-Buddhists.
4. Brahminism was/is not only a religious-ritualistic school, but also strangely rooted in politics right from its recorded history. Over the centuries the Indian socioeconomic system has been constructed to serve the interests of Brahmins as a priestly caste.
5. The neo-Buddhists of India use this slogan in prayer form. It means 'The sangha is my refuge, Buddha is my refuge, dhamma is my refuge.' Though it is in Pali, speakers of all languages understand its meaning very easily. It is not an abstract prayer as the Sanskrit mantras are.
6. While many features of Brahminism have changed over time, the essential truth of its hegemonic aspirations remains the same. For example, the beef-eating Brahmins of Buddha's time transformed themselves into vegetarians not on health or personal grounds, but in order both to neutralize Buddhist and Jain criticism of their lifestyle and to claim the moral high ground and thus retain their hegemony. Even now in central and southern India animal food is prohibited to upper caste people. In eastern India—Bengal and Orissa—fish forms part of the diet but is excluded from temple offerings, which are vegetarian. The RSS, BJP, VHP and the rest of the Hindu *parivar* are making serious attempts to extend this vegetarian food culture to Dalitbahujans. M. N. Srinivas's Sanskritization thesis promoted such thinking even in academic circles. This process has dangerous implications for the composite food culture of Dalitbahujans.
7. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Delhi: Vikas, 1970), pp. 149-150.
8. See M. N. Srinivas, ed., *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar* (New Delhi: Viking, 1996).
9. Kancha Ilaiah, 'Hinduism and the Right to Religion', *The Hindu*, December 2, 1999.
10. Kancha Ilaiah, 'Spiritual Fascism and Civil Society'.
11. L. N. Rangarajan, ed., *Kautilya: The Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1987), p. 271.
12. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. p 281. Ambedkar says, 'Buddhism died because its army of priests died and it was not possible to recreate it.

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